Guitar
MAGAZINE

JULY 2021
ISSUE 394
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ST VINCENT

"I'd come as far as I could with a certain kind of distortion"

How Annie Clark embraced clean tones and wah pedals to find her muse on Daddy's Home

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INTERVIEWS WITH DANIEL LANOIS MOLLY MILLER THE BLACK CROWES

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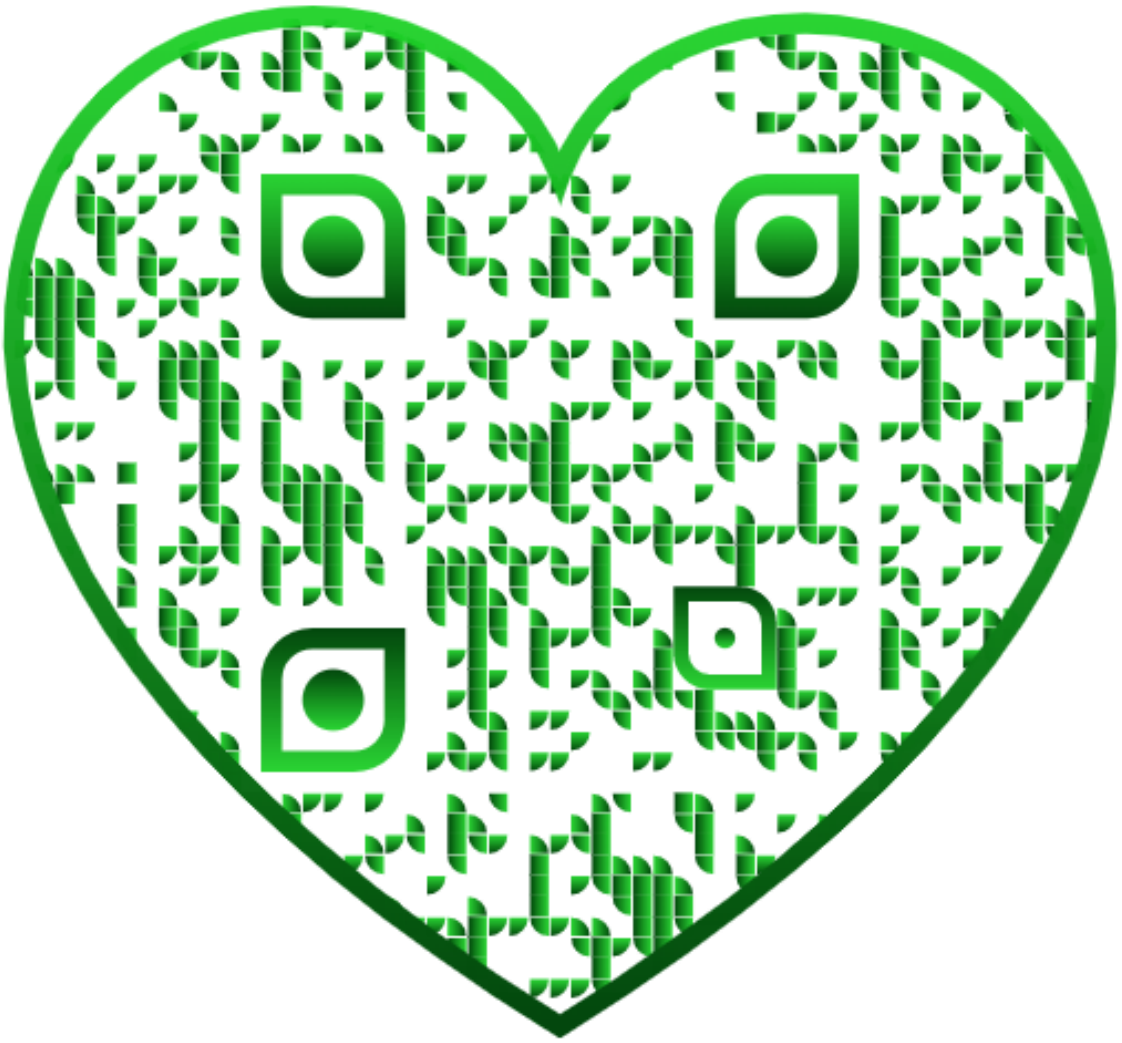

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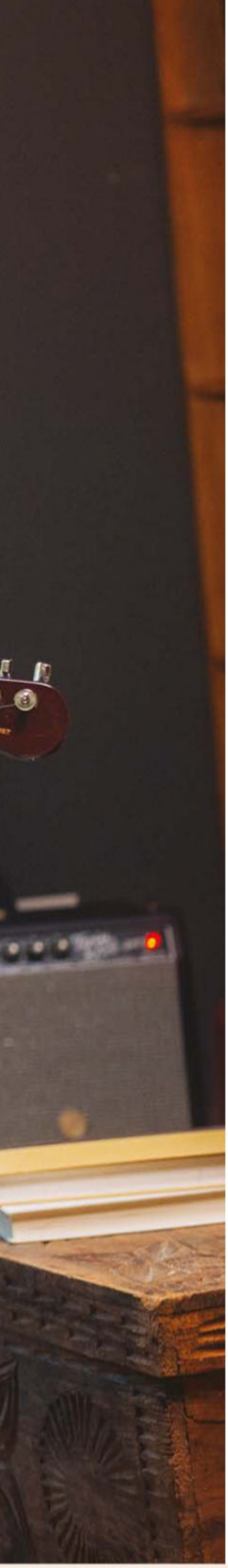

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Lower Bristol Road,
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PRINT William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce (UK) Ltd
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EDITOR'S LETTER

STAR SIGNING

Welcome to this month's issue, in which we celebrate the triumphant return of Annie Clark aka St Vincent. There's plenty to discuss. In addition to the eclectic 1970s stylings of new LP *Daddy's Home*, there's also the matter of a fabulous new version of Clark's signature Ernie Ball Music Man electric. How do you make one of the coolest signature guitars on Earth even cooler? Stick a trio of gold foil pickups in it, of course. Find out more in our cover feature from page 26 onwards.

Other than a few Les Pauls, I don't *think* I've ever owned any other signature guitars. But I've certainly played plenty that I've found appealing. Top of the heap for me is a model that was never made in any great numbers: the Gibson Luther Dickinson ES-335.

Manufactured at the now-defunct Gibson Memphis facility in 2013-14, it was very much a best-of-both-worlds proposition that combined the centre-block and superior upper-fret access of an ES-335 with the low-wind dogear P-90s of an old ES-330. Throw in a late 50s neck profile and a Bigsby B7 and the North Mississippi Allstars guitarist's signature instrument was close to being a desert island guitar for me too. You'd need electricity, of course, but what's a hypothetical uninhabited island without mains power, a tweed Deluxe and a spring reverb tank?

A panel of our contributors and team members pick their favourite signature instruments overleaf – write in and let us know which model you'd choose if money were no object. Enjoy the rest of the issue and I'll see you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

To coincide with our cover feature with Annie Clark and the launch of her new Ernie Ball Music Man signature guitar, we asked a panel of our contributors and team members to extol the virtues of their favourite signature models…

MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

HELLE-RAISER

As well as serving as *Guitar Magazine*'s resident tech talker – flip to p122 to have him walk you through a particularly tricky neck-pocket adjustment – Mike also makes some pretty damn fine YouTube videos. His favourite signature model is a maximalist wonder, the Fender John Jorgenson Hellecaster. "It's a glammed-out Stratocaster with a sparkle finish," he says. "Some might call it 'gaudy' but that would be unkind. What makes it so interesting to both high-school me and present-day me are the triple Electric XII split-coil pickups."

JOE BOSSO

DOCTOR FRANKENSTRAT

Over the years, Joe has served as editor in chief of *Guitar World*, US editor for *MusicRadar* and even vice president of A&R for Island Records, where he signed Local H, among others. When asked to name his favourite signature model, he details an encounter with a legend. "Years ago, I got to play Eddie Van Halen's one-of-a-kind Frankenstrat," he says. "He threw it to me from across his driveway and, luckily, I caught it." Turn to p20 to check out Joe's chat with acclaimed guitarist and super-producer Daniel Lanois.

DARRAN CHARLES

HUMBLE FAN

Steve Vai's characteristically flamboyant playing may have been a big influence on Darran but his favourite signature model is significantly less flowery than the Ibanez JEM. "It has to be the Eric Johnson Strat," he says. "Great vintage tones with a hefty quartersawn maple neck to boot. Eric also has the humility to omit his signature from the headstock, which always gets my nod of approval." In this issue, Darran reviews the Cort G300 Pro, "a warning shot across the bows for manufacturers everywhere". Find out why on p84.

JOSH GARDNER

WORLD EATER

Managing editor Josh has never owned a signature guitar, though he did once come close: "A 16-year-old me nearly bought a Tom DeLonge Signature Strat… not sure how that single Seymour Duncan Invader would have got on with my John Mayer phase." His ultimate signature guitar? "The Fender Jim Adkins Tele is a rare beast – thinline, two P-90s and a tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece? Everyone should have one!" Josh caught up with this month's cover star to get the inside story on the new St Vincent Goldie guitar.

ED OLESZKO

ORIGINAL CHARACTER

One half of YouTube's Tone Twins TV, Ed has more than 20 years of experience as a roadworn guitarist. For this issue, he headed down t'pub with a real Pretender. Find out more in The Collection on p44. In celebrating his favourite signature guitar(s), Ed's gone straight to the source. "For me, it all begins and ends with the creative genius of Lester William Polsfuss," he says. "Gorgeous Goldtops, Customs and the perfection of the Bursts – the world's greatest players play the guitar that bears his name: Les Paul."

RACHEL ROBERTS

YOUNG TEAM

A soon-to-be graduate of the University of Gloucestershire, Rachel has taken to music journalism just as well as she took to her first Martin Smith acoustic. On p14, the self-taught guitarist profiles an act with a similarly DIY attitude, Sydney's The Lazy Eyes. "I love that they originally recorded *Where's My Brain???* under a bunk bed," she says. "They radiate a fun energy." Speaking of fun, Rachel's favourite signature model simply oozes it. "I could've drooled when I first saw Yvette Young's Ibanez YY10. Who wouldn't love a sparkly Slime Green guitar?"

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

WINDING ME UP

Hello, *Guitar Magazine* team. My friend Alex suggested I get in touch with you after reading your letters about home-made instruments. I make bespoke guitars as a side hustle and sell them mainly to family and friends. I started making my own pickups and then went onto full builds after I had a few inquiries.

This guitar was built for my sister a couple of months ago. I call it the 'Minty Don'. All the pickups are hand-wound and made from scratch. Designed to be a guitar for mellow, crisp styles with a bit of oomph in the bridge when required, we took David Gilmour's sound as a starting point.

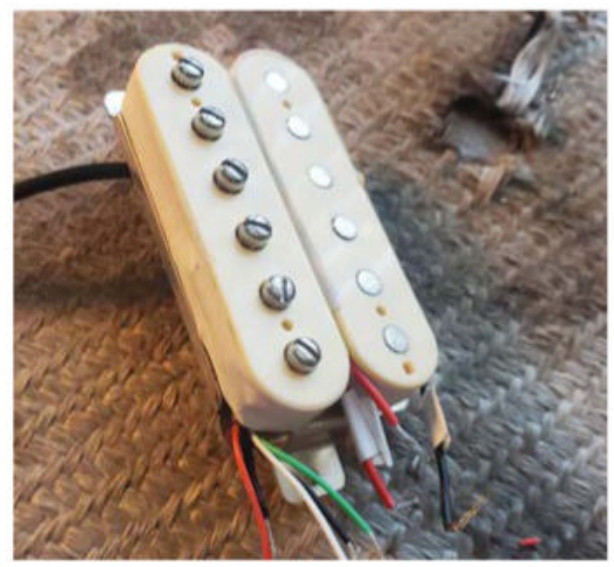
The body is alder, with a maple neck (with vintage 7.25-inch radius), a bone nut, chrome hardware and the all-important mint pickguard. I wound the pickups myself.

The neck and middle pickups are both alnico V hand-wound with 42 AWG enamel wire, with the neck unit output measuring 4.02k and the middle 4.04k. The bridge pickup is an alnico IV humbucking unit hand-wound with 42 AWG enamel wire. I added a two-way coil-split selector switch for the bridge humbucker by the main switch – chosen to offer more flexibility of sound between the middle and bridge pickups – and the pickup has a total output 8.04k (4.02k when split). I also opted for steel polepieces, plus a nickel cover and baseplate for bright tones. All the pots are quality CTS units with 0.33 and 0.42 capacitors, and I also added a treble-bleed mod on the volume pot to help retain those top-end frequencies as you roll the volume off.

It's a wonderfully versatile and clear guitar. There's lovely clarity in the neck and bridge, beautiful scooped mids, and a touch of bottom end and sparkle when you adjust the EQ. It sounds especially fantastic with a touch of reverb and chorus on clean.

The humbucker, when in single-coil mode, is lighter, clear, attacking, and bright. When engaged as a humbucker, it features noticeably more power and grunt, as well as a more rounded tone. Fuller and more robust – the alnico IV is noticeable here, offering a flatter EQ response with obvious lower-mid strength – it cuts through and delivers some serious grunt when played with distortion. It works really nicely for players who like to bend and scream on the lower strings and play a little dirtier on the bridge. It also really compliments the alnico V single-coils.

This is no wind-up: Oli's S-type features his own hand-wound pickups



It's an amazing guitar and probably the best one I've built – it's a shame I don't own it anymore!

OLI DI MEO, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for sharing your side hustle with us, Oli – a very nice home build and one that's really going to the next level by winding your own pickups. As ever, keep your DIY projects coming in – just because lockdowns are easing doesn't mean the fun home guitar projects have to stop!

SHOWING YOUR AGE

Thanks for some interesting views on ageing guitars that you featured in the June edition. But I think that in their search for technical authenticity, guitar manufacturers have missed a fantastic marketing opportunity: owner-matched ageing.

How does this work? The prospective buyer submits photos of themself when they got their first guitar and now, at the point when they can afford their dream guitar. With this frame of reference, the clever people at the Murphy Lab, Fender Custom Shop or whomever you're dealing with, painstakingly age the guitar to match the owner's current, er, maturation.

The pictures of the great Pete Townshend featured elsewhere provide a great example. He's in pretty good shape for a man of 76 – sure, there are a few marks here that speak to a wealth of accumulated stories and experiences, but nothing too over-the-top. The Telecaster that he's pictured with looks like a superb match – authentically patinated but with plenty of tunes still left to give.

My owner-matched guitar doppelgänger would be a '57 Stratocaster reissue (I can't afford an original), heavily lined, with the finish thinning away on top, refretted with a maple neck that's still smooth, and with a scratchplate that could do with whitening, just like my teeth.

Maybe you could have a whole series on 'guitars most like their owners'? Billy Gibbons' fur guitar is an obvious parallel, Robert Fripp's Fernandes LP appears to be as pristine as he remains, and Keith Richards' Micawber might just be the guitar that sums up this owner-related-ageing idea to perfection.

KENN PALMER, VIA EMAIL

A fantastic idea, Kenn, though we're not sure what would happen if someone finally took delivery of their prized custom instrument and found that the luthiers had given the guitar much heavier ageing than they felt the picture deserved, ahem…

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ST VINCENT

"I'd come as far as I could with a certain kind of distortion"
How Annie Clark embraced clean tones and wah pedals to find her muse on Daddy's Home

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ONES TO WATCH

THE LAZY EYES

WORDS RACHEL ROBERTS

The Aussie quartet's psychedelic indie-rock is the perfect combination of weird and wonderful, and will transport you to a beach house Down Under bursting with colour

The psychedelic, hypnotic sound of The Lazy Eyes has gained them over 1.5 million streams since the release of their first EP. Now that their high school days are behind them, the band are on their way to gifting the world more psychedelic pizazz as they release *EP2*. We had a chat with vocalist and guitarist Itay Shachar to discover more about their trippy aesthetic and recording under a bunk bed…

How have you progressed as a band since you recorded EP1 last year?

"We were in a totally different headspace when we recorded *EP1*. Those tracks felt like easing pressure after having sat on them since our high school days, so as soon as we got out, we thought 'Okay, we have to do this now.' With *EP2*, we had a bit more time for the textures and layers of the songs to manifest. Harvey and I would go into our little home studio and just peel back the songs like onions. We think the production is an improvement on this EP, the tracks feel more like a tapestry and there are bits that only come in for a second and then disappear forever."

***Where's My Brain???* was originally recorded under a bunk bed. How was that experience for you?**

"That was back in the day when we would, without permission, rehearse in my little brother's bedroom. I remember we kept on getting shocked to the mouth by our vocal mics because the power situation in the room was so dodgy, so we put these colourful socks over it. Enhanced the music, maybe… I don't think it sounded special, but it did feel really cool to feel so

The Lazy Eyes (l-r) Leon Karagic (bass), Harvey Geraghty (guitar, keys, vocals), Itay Shachar (vocals, guitar) and Noah Martin (drums)

synchronised. It was the first song that we weren't scared to both be playing the exact same thing on guitar. It may have sounded empty, but soon enough the energy we gave it made up for that."

How was working with [award-winning film maker] Jesse Taylor Smith for the video?

"We were really grateful to get to work with Jesse and dump our over-ambitious sci-fi ideas into his lap. We knew he had the right juice after being in awe from the videos he made with a hero band of ours, Pond. We came up with the idea that we wanted to be flying through space on a musical spaceship with Sabbath-esque duelling guitars. Jesse's idea was to instead make the world we were zooming through inner space. We were literally on a journey to find the brain."

Tell us about your current guitar and pedal set up...

"Our current setups have been worked through a million renditions over the course of a few years. We've had the same setup for quite a while now, and we get everything we need. We're not necessarily the type to dish out money and buy the newest, coolest pedal just 'because'. Most of our purchases, both instrument and pedal-wise, are to fulfil a very specific niche that we hear in our heads or to recreate from the recordings. The three pedalboards between us were very much a collaborative endeavour."

Of all the music you have released so far, do you have any standout guitar moments?

"At the end of *Cheesy Love Song*, there's a bit where the guitar ascends into the sky like a raging siren or a motorbike zooming past in slow motion. We're proud of that moment and enjoy that the end of that song in general sounds like it has nothing at all to do with the start. Halfway through we twist the knobs on the pedal to make the ascending line rush by even faster. In a live sense, we love ripping into the *Brain* solos. If the vibrations are right and our muscles relax, it can really feel like we're really playing together… Sometimes, definitely not! In the next part of that song there's a Shepard tone which plays underneath this slowly ascending and descending ostinato."

Tell us about your most interesting piece of gear...

"We really enjoy nerding out about weird gear. It would probably be my Maestro Phaser. There was a period where my favourite pastime was jumping on YouTube and exploring videos of bizarre and wonderful pedals. One night, I stumbled across this pedal and its sound was so beautiful and open. We're really picky with the way phasers sound, we like when the range is really full, and it can sound wonky if you need it to. Harvey has a vintage Pearl phaser on his board, too. But the coolest thing about the Maestro is its functionality. You have to kick the entire front face to turn the thing on and there are huge circular knobs on either side of the box so you can roll them under your feet like tennis balls to adjust the settings on the fly."

What's your most memorable gig?

"It would have to be playing a support show at the Enmore Theatre [historic music venue in Sydney – Ed]! We were so grateful to play there. The venue is special to us because we would've walked past hundreds of times each on our daily route to and from school. It's the typical thing where you always dream about playing there, so when we did, man, were we keen! Our music video for *Tangerine* was shot with footage our mate Spencer took of us performing live at Enmore. It's a full circle moment because he lyrics to that song it go "hopscotch round Enmore Theatre, they're having a show…" We'd really like to imagine a highly disinterested audience member playing a very insular game of hopscotch right at the back of the venue that night."

What's been the most surreal moment in your time in this band so far?

"We've been grinding away for a while now, so some really happy moments have popped up over the course of that. By far the most surreal thing to have happened recently is to meet and work with the celebrated record producer, Chris Thomas. He truly is a legend! Just knowing that he was in the room while some of our absolute favourite music ever was being recorded is such a surreal thought. We're going to use his mentorship on our next collection of songs and see what happens!"

The Lazy Eyes' *EP2* is out 23 July via The Orchard.

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

MOLLY MILLER TRIO
ST GEORGE

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The sought-after LA session guitarist teams up with her fellow first-call cats for a new album that puts its faith in intuition

Recorded over just two days at LA studio United Recording in 2019, Dr Molly Miller's *St George* is a lyrical album that focuses on arrangements and traditional song structures as much as it does improvisation. Performed alongside fellow session stalwarts Jennifer Condos on bass and Jay Bellerose on drums, the record is a testament to the power of trusting your intuition and musicianship. Whether the good doctor is utilising her beloved '78 ES-335 or improvising with her Shell Pink Telecaster, each song feels considered but not overworked, dancing between abundant grooves and melodies. Here, she selects her five favourite parts from the album.

ST GEORGE

"I wrote *St George* at my parents' house. Although the beginning phrase simply walks down a major scale, there was something heavy and melodic about it to me. I had to be so conscious of how I played every note to make it a melody and not a scale. Each time I played the opening phrase, I made sure it sang differently. This one was recorded on my baby, my '78 ES-335. That's the instrument that I learnt how to really play guitar on. I feel like we grew up together – my wear marks are on its neck. This piece is an important song to the record, which is maybe why it's the title track. I wanted the song to feel heavy but I love how the playfulness still comes out. Jay, Jen and I do little explosions and you think it's going somewhere but then we pull back. It feels like we breath together. There are only two places on the record that have overdubs – the very end of this piece is one of them. We layered multiple guitar parts down; it almost doesn't sound like a guitar during that section to me."

OVER THE FENCE

"This is a nod to Booker T & The MG's. Jen and her friend Thomas Juliano wrote it together. Jen sent me a demo and then the trio reimagined it. My favourite part of the track is the drum and bass breakdown. I could live in that groove. All of the improvisation on this record is over changes, chords moving. This one is all one chord. We are creating a story with just one chord. It's all about how we interact together – we listen, we build and then we explode. "

SPRY

"I am a sucker for songs in three. I like the angst of them. The unrest. The movement. There aren't lyrics to my songs but they're written about specific things from specific periods in my life. *Spry* was written during a time when I was putting my energy in the wrong places. *Spry* is a message to myself about how I want to exist: with lightness and clarity. That story is being told through the melody, improvisation and interactions between Jen, Jay and me. I used my Tele – a Shell Pink 2008 '52 reissue, which now has a new neck – and a Princeton on this track."

SLOW BURN TO NOWHERE

"I recorded this on my '78 ES-335 and used the Chase Bliss Audio Dark World pedal on it. It added the body and the eeriness that I wanted for this piece. This was the last song written before the session. I wrote it in one sitting. I love how the guitar solo starts; it feels like it's rolling. I'd originally planned to have a bass solo but Jen came up with the idea of the bass playing the melody the second time around, which I love. Jen, Jay and I enjoy the arranging process. How do we get these songs to become stories? Jen is one of the most melodic and deep players I know. Her groove is heavy, her sound is big."

HEAR IT CALLING

"Most of these songs were recorded in a few takes – the whole record was done in two days, with barely any overdubs. But *Hear It Calling* was recorded on the first take. We were more just warming up with the song so our incredible engineer, Mike Piersante, could get sounds. As soon as we finished it though, we knew we'd just done 'the take'. I love old country music; you can hear that influence on this. I'm a big fan of drum and guitar breakdowns; I grew up playing with my brother Sammy, who is an incredible drummer, so I'm comfortable in that space. There's a different level of freedom and responsibility that exists with just drums and guitar and good lord is it fun to play with Jay."

St George is out now on GSI Records

© Robbie Jeffers

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

THE ARISTOCRATS
Spanish Eddie

Guthrie Govan and co tease their upcoming live album with this stunning performance taken from the supergroup's most recent studio LP. Strap in and hold on tight: this is a technical tour de force.

CORRADO RUSTICI
Night Of The Jackal

Renowned Italian guitarist and producer Corrado Rustici commands a melting pot of jazz/rock fusion and modern electro across this virtuosic first release from his daring new instrumental solo album *Interfulgent*.

ST VINCENT
Daddy's Home

The title track from Annie Clark's latest features one of the few appearances of her trademark angular fuzz on the record. Find out why she traded distortion for a Coral Sitar in our interview on p26.

THE VACCINES
Headphones Baby

A pop-leaning single from one of the foremost purveyors of Naughties lad-rock, *Headphones Baby* boasts polished production and phased acoustic guitars – an intriguing tease for their as-yet unannounced fifth LP.

DJ SNAKE & SELENA GOMEZ
Selfish Love (Acoustic Mix)

Remixed by Mateus Asato, the 27-year-old virtuoso's first release since his recent break from music sees him reimagining this unlikely house-pop crossover as a more intimate, acoustic-led Latin-vibed track.

LOST SYMPHONY
TAKE ANOTHER PIECE

Featuring Marty Friedman, Nuno Bettencourt and Alex Skolnick among others, the single form the classical-metal band's forthcoming third album features a litany of masterful guitar work.

MYLES KENNEDY
The Mob Rules

In covering this Dio-era Black Sabbath track, the Alter Bridge and Conspirators frontman showcases his sombre side, offering heart-breaking vocals and an undeniably cool overdriven slide solo.

SLEATER-KINNEY
Worry With You

The first single from Sleater-Kinney's forthcoming self-produced LP *Path Of Wellness* opens with a gnarly melody that twists around the drums and echoes the microtonality of King Gizzard records.

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN
Wolves At The Door

Malmsteen's new neoclassical offering was aided by the pandemic, which afforded him some rare time in the studio. The result? Dig out those leather slacks – this one is brimming with typical Yngwie pomp.

JAWS
UNTITLED

This latest single from the dream-pop quartet features bouncing bass rhythms and reverb-laden arpeggiated melodies that introduce the track, before it opens up into more ambient shoegaze territory.

THE BLACK KEYS
Going Down South

Another cut from new LP *Delta Kream*, one of RL Burnside's best-known songs has been reinterpreted here by Auerbach and Carney, who amplify its raucousness with additional falsetto vocals and killer slide work.

MODEST MOUSE
We Are Between

The US indie-rock outfit return with a track that, according to the band, is subject to "dramatic mutations and mood swings". We can't argue with that – this one is flush with the discordant guitar sounds of the 2000s.

WIN! AN EPIPHONE SG SPECIAL P-90 AND DAREDEVIL ATOMIC COCK PEDAL

WORTH £580

To celebrate the limited-edition vinyl release of Bowie guitarist Mick Ronson's *Play Don't Worry/Angel No.9: Live* for Record Store Day 2021, we're giving away this killer guitar and pedal combination

Record Store Day is a chance for crate-diggers the world over to support independent stores and labels by bagging rare treats from their favourite artists. As part of RSD2021, WDGO Music are paying tribute to David Bowie's right-hand Spider from Mars, Mick Ronson, with a limited-edition orange vinyl pressing of the guitarist performing two of his solo cuts, *Play Don't Worry* and *Angel No.9*, live on the legendary *Old Grey Whistle Test*.

To celebrate this release, we've teamed up with WDGO Music to give away everything you'll need to channel your inner Ronno at home: an Epiphone SG Special P-90 in Sparkling Burgundy alongside a Daredevil Atomic Cock fixed wah pedal, designed to emulate Ronson's signature tone. If that wasn't enough, we'll also be including a Mick Ronson 'UFO' T-shirt, plus a guitar strap and cables. To enter, simply head over to *Guitar.com* and answer the following question. Good luck!

When did Mick Ronson originally release the album *Play Don't Worry*?

A) 1975
B) 1979
C) 1985

Enter at guitar.com/competitions

Visit wdgomusic.com for more on Mick Ronson's *Play Don't Worry/Angel No.9: Live*

Terms & Conditions

The closing date is 23:59 GMT, 2 July 2021.

The Company's decision is final. This competition is open to the United Kingdom residents only. This competition is open to 18 years old and above only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos.

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GOSPEL TRAILS

Daniel Lanois knows a thing or two about capturing atmospheric guitar tones on record. To find out more, we catch up with the Canadian producer and guitarist to talk working with U2 and Dylan, how his beloved '53 Goldtop is like no other Les Paul he's ever seen, and why he's embracing gospel tradition on his new record *Heavy Sun*, even if he's "not much of a church man"

WORDS JOE BOSSO

With a résumé that features such Grammy-winning and epoch-defining records as U2's *The Joshua Tree*, Peter Gabriel's *So*, Emmylou Harris's *Wrecking Ball*, and Bob Dylan's *Time Out Of Mind*, alongside various and sundry masterpieces by the likes of Robbie Robertson, Neil Young and Willie Nelson, Daniel Lanois doesn't exactly have to cold-call artists and managers looking for work.

"I sort of operate by invitation," Lanois tells us. "A lot of times, I'm very flattered and surprised when somebody wants to get together and try something. It's like you go on a little journey to see if you can find a new sound or a different manner of expression."

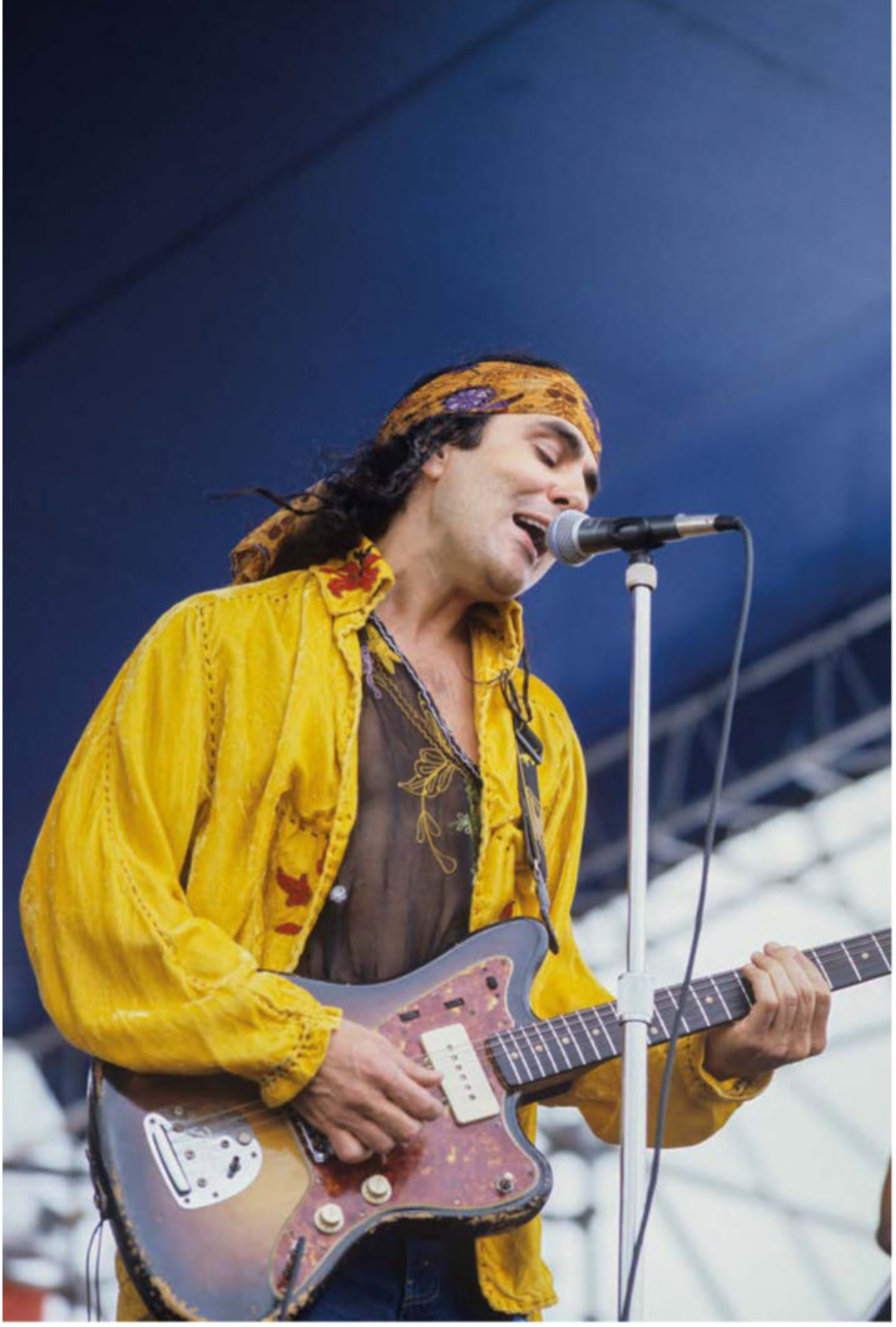
Lanois is between production projects right now. But that could change at any moment. "You never know when the stars might align," he says. "I got a call from Beach House the other day and they're going to send me a few things to listen to. So we might do a little work together."

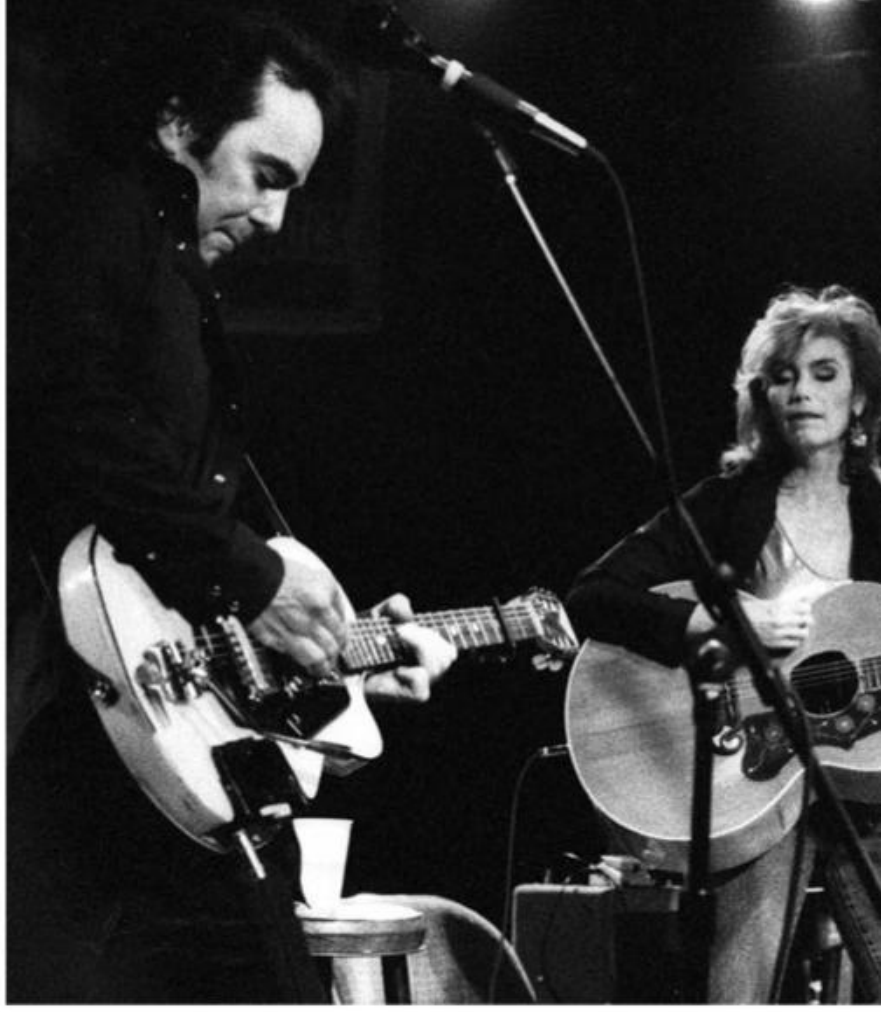
Sometimes, while driving around in his old Crown Victoria police car, Lanois will hear a track on the radio that intrigues him. But he laments that he never knows who he's listening to. "It's got a stock radio that doesn't list what it's playing. I'll be tuned to a hip-hop station and the songs will have some cool samples and really great bottom-end. I'll think, 'My goodness, these people are really onto something'. But I don't know what they are. I need to get a new sound system."

If there is a Daniel Lanois sound, it exists more in aspiration and intent, although the albums he touches do share some characteristics. A longtime guitarist, he's big on echo and reverb, oftentimes juxtaposing cavernous guitar sounds with traditional, naturalistic tones – and the results are both exploratory and accessible. "A lot of what I do is manipulating sounds," he says. "Sometimes you hear something and it's perfect, and all you've got to do is get it recorded. Other times, you mess around with a sound and you take it somewhere new. There's no formula for it."

In addition to outside production work, Lanois has been prolific as a solo artist, a touring guitarist for Emmylou Harris, and an occasional band member; his most recent collaborations have been with Black Dub (which includes drummer Brian Blade, bassist Daryl Johnson and singer/multi-instrumentalist Trixie Whitley) and a project with breakcore artist Aaron Funk (aka Venetian Snares) entitled, appropriately enough, *Venetian Snares x Daniel Lanois*.

In 2009, Lanois produced the album *Mercy* for LA-based singer and dobro master Rocco DeLuca. The two stayed in touch over the years, collaborating from time to time, including on music for blockbuster videogame *Red Dead Redemption 2*. Now the pair have reunited on Lanois' new solo album, *Heavy Sun*, alongside organist-vocalist Johnny Shepherd (whom Lanois met while he was moonlighting as guitarist for the Hallelujah Train band in Lousiana) and bassist-vocalist Jim Wilson.





ABOVE Lanois with a weathered Jazzmaster in New Orleans in 1992

RIGHT Cradling a Fender Mustang in 1988

There are moments of gorgeous and ethereal guitar playing throughout the record but the vocals (particularly those by DeLuca) and organ are the main stars here. *Heavy Sun* is a curiously engaging mix of gospel and electronica, Latin-tinged grooves and unbridled soul power.

"I grew up on a lot of gospel music that featured the organ," Lanois explains. "But then I also fell in love with Wilson Pickett, Sam & Dave, and all the great soul singers.

"Johnny's got that thing I remember from hearing those guys, so we put our little thing together. The minute I heard everybody together, I said, 'Wait a minute – we're onto something'."

To find out exactly what they were onto during the *Heavy Sun* sessions, we chat to Lanois and dig a little deeper…

Where did you record *Heavy Sun*?
"At both of my places. In Toronto I have an old monk's Buddhist temple, and in California I've got a beautiful 1920s villa in Silver Lake."

You're not a standard studio kind of guy. Even back in the day, you never seemed to work at big studios like the Hit Factory...
"I did but not as much as other people. I worked at the Record Plant on a Peter Gabriel record, and I did some Robbie Robertson work at the Hit Factory. I like formal studios. I like the fact that somebody's at the front desk. 'Good morning, Mr. Lanois'. And I say, 'Hold my calls'. I like that culture."

It seems as if you like to create your own unique environment to make a record. You don't inhabit somebody else's world.
"Yes, because I came up that way. I always had my own place and we liked recording in unusual locations. When I went to work with U2, we recorded in a castle. It was exciting. The nice advantage to that is you set

LEFT Lanois performing alongside Emmylou Harris in Los Angeles in 1996

BELOW LEFT Much more recently, with his beloved 1953 Goldtop

"I'M NOT MUCH OF A CHURCH MAN BUT I APPRECIATE THE POWER OF CONGREGATION AND THE SPIRIT OF MUSIC. THE TONALITIES THAT EXIST IN GOSPEL MUSIC APPEAL TO ME"

up the studio for a specific project. People feel that kind of commitment – 'Whoa, we built the studio specifically for this record'. It feels very special, and you get to customise your environment.

"I did it for The Neville Brothers in New Orleans. I set up a studio around the corner from Valence Street, where they lived in an old apartment building. We hung moss from the walls and had a very swampy environment for them. They thought that was a lot of fun. I rented a house for Dylan when I recorded him in New Orleans. I had a little bit of stolen time in it. I said to him, 'You're going to get to a place nobody knows about'."

Do you sometimes encounter problems mic'ing and tracking guitars in such places?

"It's a beast we wrestle with. I recorded a guitar with Robbie Robertson in this tiny studio in LA. Robbie had a little room and we did a bunch of guitar work and got a great guitar sound. Then when he went into the really big room, we lost the sound. How does that happen? It's always a struggle. How many times have we sounded good in a kitchen but then gone into a studio and the vibe's not there? You just never know with rooms.

"On *Heavy Sun*, I invited my co-singers to come to the console with me. We sang right to the speakers; we kept the speakers kind of quiet, and we shared microphones. So we were just kind of kitchen singing, really. We got to harmonise and blend acoustically, according to what we were hearing musically coming out of the speakers. Plus, it makes things go faster. Nobody was behind glass, nobody wanted headphones, and we actually found that our pitch was better without headphones. We could nail the phrasing and work on a stanza and play it back, maybe make little corrections about which notes to sustain and emphasise and all that. Would we have done better with my beautiful tube U 47s behind glass, with everybody wearing headphones? We might have had more isolation but people don't care about isolation in the end, do they?"

In many ways, with your choice of recording locations, you were ahead of the curve. Nowadays, people are recording anywhere they please. Home recording is a huge business. The era of the giant studio with the receptionist out front is coming to an end.

"Part of me is sad to see conventional studios go out of business. I never would wish that on anyone. But in regards to being ahead of the curve, I wasn't the first one to do this but I certainly made a lot of records with that technique, just setting up in an old farmhouse.

"We made *The Joshua Tree* in an old farmhouse outside of Dublin and that was fantastic. The big front room was great for drums because it had a wooden floor, and everything was beautiful and powerful sounding in there. You might go into a conventional studio and not be able to get that kind of resonance from your drums, and have to create it artificially. I wish I could tell you there was some kind of formula to it all but there isn't."

You mix gospel and ambience on *Heavy Sun*. Was that always the agenda?

"We had an agenda once we decided to make a record. We met Johnny Shepherd in Shreveport, Louisiana. I'm a visiting guitar player in the house band called Hallelujah Train. My good friend, Brian Blade, plays drums in the band when he's home. That's how it started. Johnny was the choir director, organist and singer. I thought, 'Oh, geez, maybe this is it – I can invite Johnny to be part of the vocal group I've been wanting all my life'.

"That became the agenda: a chance meeting and thinking, 'We have a nice vibe – let's go and make a nice singing record'. We weren't about to make a conventional gospel record. I'm not much of a church man, but I appreciate the power of congregation and the spirit of music. The tonalities that exist in gospel music appeal to me. And, as usual, I say, 'Okay, we respect tradition but how do we take things to the future?'"

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Rocco DeLuca is such a great guitar player, especially on a resonator. Was there a basic intention to downplay that element on this record?
"Rocco is a great fingerpicker. Whether he's on an acoustic instrument or electric guitar, we've always played really well together. I'm a good fingerpicker myself. We get a nice groove going. I've heard him play slide… The house fell apart with very powerful volume, almost bordering on metal. I appreciate that about him, and I wanted to make sure that he was involved with this record. He also has the most beautiful voice; he's got a timbre on the high notes that I've not heard from anybody else. It's a tenderness that's angelic. So while we didn't go to the dobro, it should be known that Rocco has an incredible palette of guitar expression."

The guitar playing on tracks such as *Power* and *Every Nation* is extremely economical. It's almost about how much you don't play.
"Sometimes, yeah. *Power* has a long instrumental passage before the vocals come in. That was written on steel guitar. I overdubbed some Mellotron strings in unison with a guitar, so it's hidden. There's also some pretty nice fingerpicking going on in there – it's a little bit buried in the mix, but it's there. I played those referencing the fingerpicking I was talking about a minute ago. I like the guitar playing that Rocco did. His performance from the camera shoot made its way onto the record."

What's the secret to that glassy, bell-like guitar sound that you get on the song *Way Down*?
"That was done on my Guild. I have an all-mahogany Guild acoustic from the 1970s. I put an LR Baggs passive pickup on it, which allows me to go DI or into a little amp. I think I used a combination of DI and a little Fender tweed. It might've been a Champ. I have a nice selection of small tweeds. I'm fingerpicking the bassline – that's what's creating the bell sound. Plus, I used a little triplet echo, so it's tripping over itself, and then I doubled it."

BELOW Lanois creating atmospherics on pedal steel in Berlin in 2015

You bought your famous 1953 Les Paul Goldtop back in the 80s. When you picked it up, did you just have a feeling about it, like it was meant to tell stories?
"That's just it. I loved it the minute I saw it. I hadn't even picked it up, and I loved it. It was in the window of We Buy Guitars. I looked at it and said, 'Why does that Les Paul look different from the Les Pauls that I'm familiar with?' It had something to do with its contours. The price tag was $800. It had a trapeze tailpiece that wasn't very popular at the time – you bang them and they go out of tune. But I didn't care. I bought it anyhow, and I've been using it ever since."

Did you make any modifications to it?
"Larry Cragg, the great guitar builder and technician, modified it for me. He put on a tune-o-matic and it was just perfect. We didn't have to re-angle the neck. And he threw on a Bigsby because I wanted to be Neil Young. And then I went with a humbucker in place of the P-90 in the back position and my Gretsch knobs – and that's me."

How long did it take you to figure out the combination of the P-90 and the humbucker?
"I don't. I never use a combination of the two. I mostly use the P-90 in the front and then I just whack the switch to the back pickup, and then it becomes this biting sound that's so different. I've found that really useful live for a radical shift. The P-90 was always louder, so I've had to keep that in mind. I've got to dig in a little bit on the humbucker but I kind of got hooked on the extreme colour change that I had available to me."

What was your main guitar before the Goldtop?
"I used to play a butterscotch Tele. I have a couple of them. I have a new one and have gotten great results with it but I just moved onto the Les Paul and didn't look back. But every now and again, I think, 'I'm going to go do a tour with that Telecaster'.

We read somewhere that you said you wouldn't sell the Goldtop for less than $50,000. Did you ever get any offers?
"No, I didn't. I wouldn't take $50,000. I wouldn't sell it for anything now. It's just priceless to me."

How about the 'Dark Animal' Vox AC30? Are you still using that?
"Yes. I have another one that I like just as much at Peter Gabriel's studio. I've had it there since the 80s

and I never picked it up. A few years ago, I was touring in England and I was reunited with my old Vox. I had the folks at Vox do a little refurbishing, because the grille cloth was completely ripped. They did some nice cosmetic work on it, and it's close to the Dark Animal. It's got silver speakers and the Dark Animal has blue ones. When I was working with Edge, his favourite Vox had one blue speaker and one silver. We would move the mic from one speaker to the other and whichever one sounded better, that's the one we mic'd."

You also mentioned that you used a Fender Champ on the album.
"Yes. A good thing about the Champ is you get a nice sound without being too loud in the room. So if I'm trying to blend in acoustically with my mates, sometimes I'll go to a Champ because the amp's not very loud in the room. I've had really nice results with smaller amps when recording – they don't drown out the vocals. I'm almost treating it so you don't drown out the vocal acoustically. I've got a few Champs and I try and keep them in good shape. We don't have to overdrive them. It depends on what you want to do but it's kind of a clean, almost acoustic sound, but it's electric."

How about pedal effects? Do you use a lot of them?
"No pedals. I just use a tuner, but I started using my rack Korg SDD-3000. They're hard to keep in shape though. With guitar, I'm usually straight up. I mean, historically, when working with Edge, we had a few toys we were excited about at a given time. But, generally speaking, I start with a clear sound, a guitar straight into an amp, or I might have the SDD-3000. But even at that, I try and record a dry side and a processed side. The advantage to the Korg is that it's got a lot of outputs, so you have options."

When you pick up the guitar, what do you usually play? Do you do this thing we call 'practising'?
"No, no, not at all. I mean, I've got to get my fingers strong if I'm about to tour but I don't do scales or any of that stuff. I did all that as a kid.

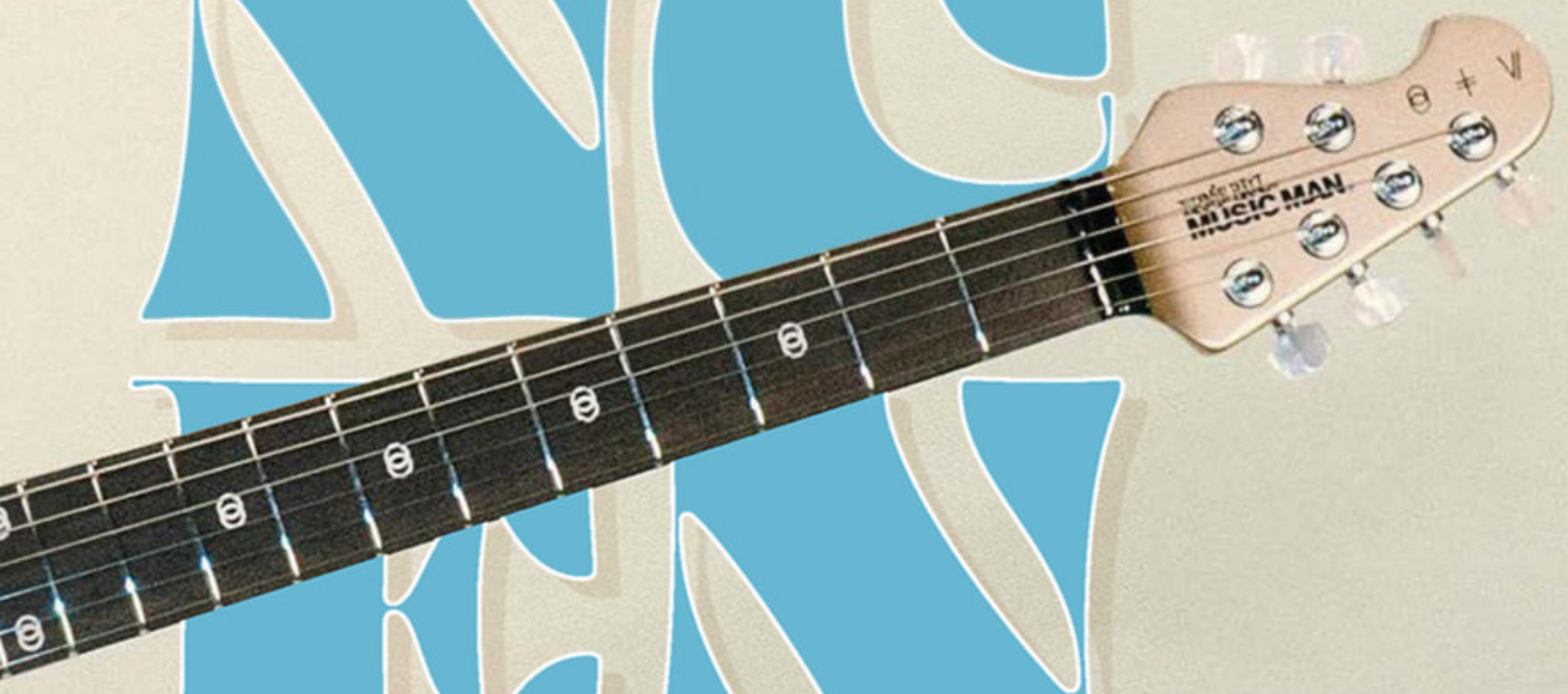
"You can tell I fingerpick. I don't use a flatpick; I like flesh on the string, using my index or my thumb to isolate individual notes. That's just how I play. I've never been a super-fast player. I admire fast players but I was never very good at it. Years ago, I just decided to go up another street."

***Heavy Sun* is out now on Maker Series**

ABOVE Lanois on stage in 2015 with Jim Wilson on bass and the Goldtop he "wouldn't sell for anything now"

© Frank Hoensch • Jordi Vidal / Redferns via Getty Images

ST VINCENT

Annie Clark might well be the most important guitar player on the planet today. As her alter ego St Vincent, Clark has spent more than a decade sculpting inventive pop music that puts the guitarist's virtuosic abilities front and centre, all while reaping critical acclaim and global superstardom. Along the way to the top of the musical mountain, she even found time to craft an instant-classic signature model that has found favour with artists as diverse as Jack White and Willow Smith. So where does she go from there? For Clark, the answer was to head back to where it all began: the simple joy of playing guitar, the welcoming embrace of her childhood influences, and the unique and wonderful qualities of guitars with gold foil pickups...

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THE Guitar INTERVIEW

"I just get curious about other things. There are so many things that I want to try and still so many things that music has to teach me." Annie Clark is mulling over the notion of recording an album that isn't a serious stylistic shift from the one that came before. From the jazz-spiked indie-rock of her 2007 debut *Marry Me* to her self-titled commercial breakthrough in 2014 and her ascent to superstardom on a wave of latex, square-wave fuzz and electronic beats on 2017's *Masseduction*, Clark's muse has proved as restless as it has been captivating.

All of which brings us to her latest, *Daddy's Home*. St Vincent's sixth solo album is another stylistic shift but the real surprise lies in the nature of it. After the hyper-processed guitar sounds and pounding beats of *Masseduction*, *Daddy's Home* shows us a side of Annie Clark that we haven't seen before. Heavily channelling the vibes of the 1970s pop music that she grew up adoring, the angular riffs and crushing fuzz have been replaced here by delicate clean tones, a languid, almost improvisational flavour, and lashings of sitar and wah. Even by Clark's standards, it's a left turn. But it's one informed by what came before.

"I think it was a response," she tells us after a quick detour to grab a blanket before settling in for our conversation. "The guitar playing and the style on *Masseduction* was a lot of right angles and this record has way more wiggly lines."

Clark's playing has always possessed an almost mechanically precise quality but from the very first Prince-like chord stab of album opener *Pay Your Way In Pain*, there's a sense of freedom and looseness to proceedings that sounds almost improvisational.

"I mean, every melody was an improvisation at some point," she jokes. "But, yeah, I was improvising, just jammin' in my studio. It was very fun. On previous records, I was invested in writing guitar parts that were complicated, underneath vocal parts that were also complicated. They were like syncopated puzzle pieces working together. But it would take a lot of practice to get to the point where it was effortless and fun. But in this case, I was like, 'How do people normally do this? Oh yeah: they sing something and then they play something, and then they sing something again and then they play something'. So it was like, 'Let me try to do that', and not have these things necessarily be like interlocking puzzle pieces, but have them be more call and response."

Lounge Act

Daddy's Home is far from a classic-rock record but, as with everything St Vincent has done in recent years, its mood and vibe – from the guitar tones and the gear used to achieve them to the artwork and even the outfits worn by Clark when promoting it – are all perfectly calibrated to reflect the 1970s lounge-act aesthetic that the album captures.

"That's probably the music I've listened to more than anything. Those records from the early 70s, they were like my education," Clark says of her motivations for tapping into such a specific time and place. "I always liked The Rolling Stones but I never really *got it* in a deep way until making this record. I think some of my interests and musical values were a little different then. But this kind of music has vibe, and space, and it's all about feel and people playing in a room. I don't think that I was ready actually to like that kind of music back then."

"It's the music that has been the most influential to me yet I've never touched on it. I probably wasn't ready to touch on it until now"

The Stones are perhaps more of a philosophical than a sonic touchpoint. But listen to tracks such as *Live In The Dream* and you'll hear Pink Floyd pulled through the St Vincent prism, while the title track wears Clark's love of Prince firmly on its wide 1970s cuffs.

"That music is music that I've listened to more in my life than anything," she explains. "When I think about that, it's the music that has been the most influential to me ever and yet I've never really touched on it. I think, again, I probably wasn't ready in some ways to touch on it until now. Maybe it took me having a vibe and willingness to think about it less like a classical composition and more like, you know, I hate to say the word but jam-y? Jam-y with form," she corrects herself. "Jam-y within song."

For Clark, that's an important distinction. "I'm not a big personal fan of the 'formless jam'. It doesn't really interest me. It's very fun for the players involved and not very fun for the listener, in my experience."

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18+

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“Goldie is genuinely a whole new guitar. The other one is definitely more like a burly rock monster and this is more crystalline and vintage”

Foil’s Gold

In addition to championing the guitar as a vehicle for relentless creativity within the realms of pop music and beyond, Clark’s other invaluable contribution to modern guitar culture can be seen strapped around her neck every time she walks out on stage. The Music Man St Vincent model is less a signature guitar than a contemporary phenomenon – when Clark revealed the guitar for the first time at Taylor Swift’s LA residency in 2015, nobody, not even Ernie Ball, was prepared for what came next.

By the time Swift had posted a photo of her, Clark and Beck checking out the guitar backstage, dealers were already clogging the phone lines at Music Man HQ and the company’s website had almost crashed under a tidal wave of interest. And that was before a single guitar had even been sold. It was clear that Ernie Ball had a hit on its hands.

The guitar was officially launched a few months later at NAMM 2016. Things have only snowballed since. It’s been used by Jack White at one end of the scale and Willow Smith at the other. There’s been an affordable Sterling version and limited-edition colour runs have pushed the boundaries further, not least the 2017 *Masseduction* collection, which featured a neon-orange variation with leopard-print plastics.

The latter doesn’t exactly fit the character of *Daddy’s Home*. But fortunately the guitar has received another new evolution in Goldie. This new variant of the St Vincent model sports the same fundamentals as the regular guitar but softens things somewhat: the scratchplate is smaller, more traditional; the finishes more restrained; even the names of the three finishes on offer – Cashmere, Velveteen and Silk Charmeuse – feel like they were plucked from a 1970s furniture catalogue. But which came first, the guitar or the vibe?

“This record is totally the inspiration for the guitar,” says Clark. “I was going back to a lot of the cleaner, chimey, direct into a console tones that I feel like I did a lot of when I was playing old Filter’Trons and Harmony guitars with the gold foil pickups. It’s kind of an homage. I played the prototype of the guitar quite a bit [on the album]. We made some slight adjustments here and there but, yeah, it’s genuinely a whole new guitar. It just has a very different feeling and a very different sound for where I am now, y’know? The other one is definitely more like a burly rock monster and this is, I would say, more crystalline and vintage.”

Key to this sonic departure – and the reason for the guitar’s name – are the aforementioned gold foil pickups: specifically a trio of new Music Man gold foil mini-humbuckers, which sit proudly in Goldie’s okoume body. The pickups are a nod to Clark’s pre-Music Man days, when she could rarely be seen without a vintage Harmony Bobkat. Nostalgia for the unique sound that those pickups offer was part of what spurred the development of the new guitar.

“I love them,” she enthuses. “I love them. I’d taken a break from them and they’re back and, oh, it feels like home! I think there’s a sensitivity to them and there’s a dynamic range within them that’s really fun to play with. They are – and I just keep repeating the word – crystalline, and high and chimey and bell-like. But it’s not abrasive. I just think they’re versatile and make this a bit more of a sensitive instrument… I’m sure the term ‘sensitive’ is really going to move these guitars, right?!”

TOP LEFT Clark’s original Music Man model sported a trio of mini-humbuckers

BOTTOM LEFT Clark playing with Pat Smear, Dave Grohl, Beck and Krist Novoselic during charity Nirvana reunion show Heaven is Rock and Roll in January 2020

© Emma McIntyre / Getty Images for The Recording Academy

"If I play something on my Coral Sitar, it sounds cool and tough and bratty. But bratty without being nu-metal, y'know? It can take the place of something distorted and has more character"

ABOVE Clark with her Neon Orange *Masseduction* collection guitar in 2018

OPPOSITE St Vincent using her none more black 2018 limited-run model at the 2019 Grammy Awards

But the differences between Goldie and the OG St Vincent model don't stop there. In keeping with its classic disposition, Goldie has ditched the unconventional switching for a more typical five-way layout, a concession to players who found the original options a little confusing. Additionally, in a first for a Music Man production guitar, the headstock has also been reversed.

"That was an aesthetic choice mostly," Clark explains. "Because one of the things you find when you make an unconventional guitar shape is that the balance becomes really important – the aesthetic balance of things. And so between changing the shape of the pickguard and offsetting and changing the angle of the pickups and the headstock, I just wanted the whole thing to just look a little bit more balanced, even in its off-kilter shape."

Sitar Star

If there was a single sound that summed up 2017's *Masseduction*, it was the chainsaw-like riffs of the title track. But *Daddy's Home* doesn't just tone down the distortion, it practically does away with it altogether. Instead, Clark turned to a very unlikely source to add a touch of dissonance and grit to the album: a 1967 Coral Sitar.

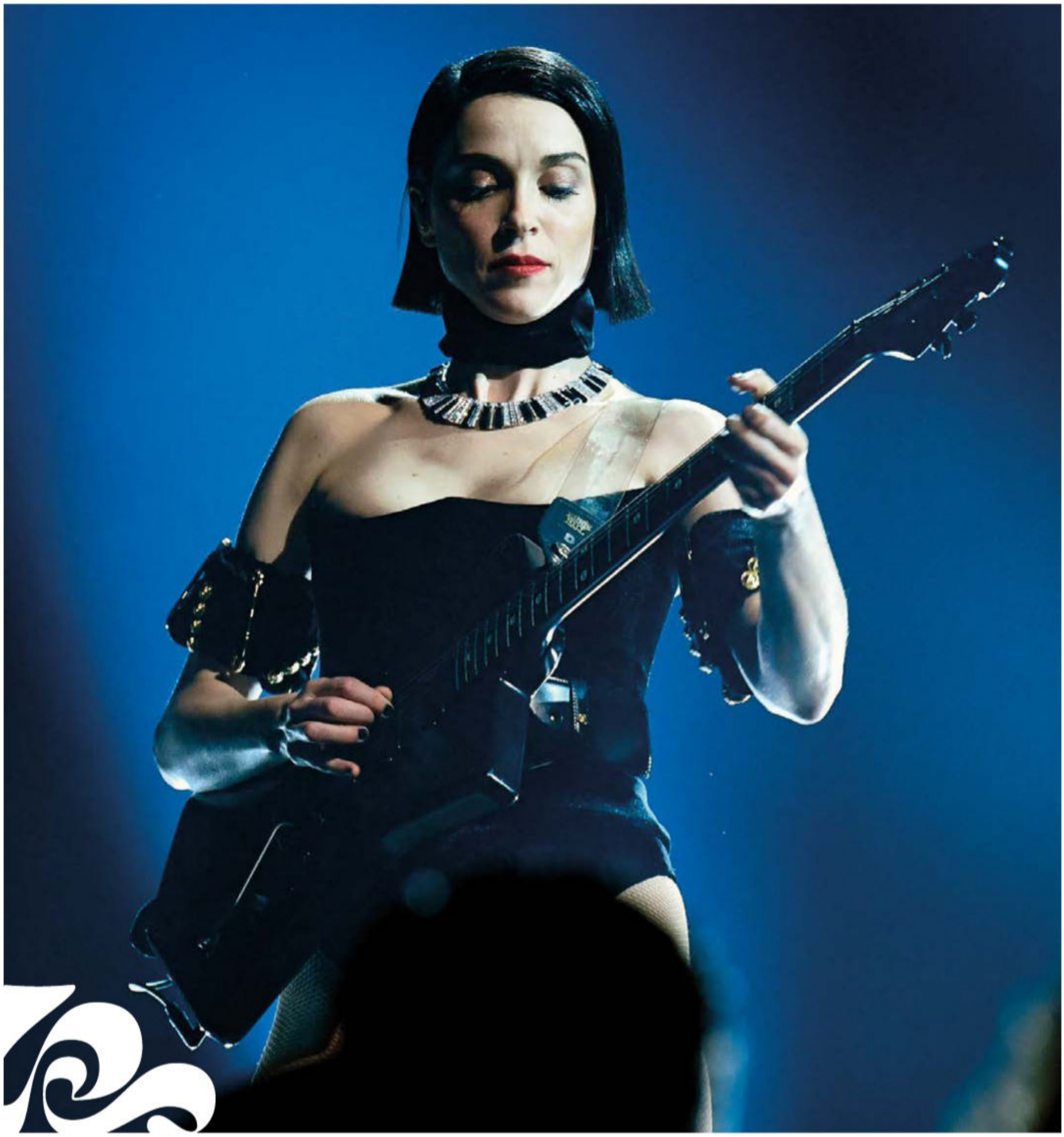
"I went to visit Jack [Antonoff, co-producer] in the studio and we were just working on some other things, and I picked it up and was like, 'Oh, this is interesting!'" says Clark. "And what it did, because it has that brittle but evocative texture, it kind of took the place of distorted guitar, because it has a massive amount of poke to it but it has a different feeling. Y'know, the song *Down*, in another life, on another one of my records, that would've been like some heavy, *heavy* riff. But this time, I was like, 'Actually, if I just play this on my Coral Sitar, this is kind of cool and tough and bratty'. But bratty without being like, nu-metal, y'know? It can take the place of something really distorted and it just has more character. So it was fun to use and then it became a real staple on the album, and especially because there are aspects – I keep saying that the record is like 17 per cent psychedelic, so it definitely puts the flag in the ground in terms of psychedelic texture."

Another leftfield hallmark of the new album is its unabashed use of wah, something that Clark has come to very late but clearly became enamoured with during the making of *Daddy's Home*.

"I love it," she enthuses animatedly. "I love a wah! Y'know, I don't think I've ever used a wah before? I mean, I didn't *own* one before this so I don't think I did? But it was a lot of fun. Also, because I had come as far as I could go, in a way, with a certain kind of distortion – I don't know if guitar tones have a whole lot of context and baggage but this felt like I went all the way around to come back to where I'm from, in a funny way? Like, I went all the way around like, 'No, guitars need to sound like synths!' and all of this stuff, to come back to, 'Oh, this is really fun, to just play guitar that sounds like guitar'. It felt fresh again.'"

Stay On Target

It's difficult not to get swept up along with Clark when she gets carried away talking about guitars, and it's clear that the instrument remains at the core of who she is as an artist and a person, just as it has almost since the start.



© Tim Mosenfelder / Getty Images • Emma McIntyre / Getty Images for The Recording Academy

"I was really obsessed with guitars from the time I was young," she explains. "My uncle is an amazing guitar player, Tuck Andress [of jazz duo Tuck & Patti], and I remember when we were growing up, we had his old student guitar, which was a Kay, and the action was so high. I still can't play it, the action is so high! It's still in the closet somewhere at my mom's house. So that was around, I was just curious about it. I would beg my mother to buy me cheap toy guitars – y'know, guitars that didn't actually play but that were $15 at Target. I was just really besotted with them. I would make them, y'know, as a craft project, and again, those didn't play either but they were for the vibe!"

What truly lit the fire beneath Clark and saw her take the leap from craft guitarist to full-on player was being exposed to Hendrix for the first time.

"I think one of the first moments of being like, 'Holy shit, this is it – this is everything' was hearing Hendrix doing *All Along The Watchtower*," Clark recalls. "That was just like, 'What is this feeling? How can I climb inside this and never leave?' I was 12, I guess. A friend's dad had a white Strat that he was very proud of and he showed me how to play *Manic Depression* and I was like, 'Woah'. Then I begged my parents for one of my own. I think the first thing I had was a little classical guitar and I was like, 'This ain't it'. I wanted an electric guitar so I traded that up for, I think it was a Peavey Raptor. It was one of those with like the amp built in, the whole thing. So, Peavey Raptor, that was my first guy and then, after that, I think I graduated to a Cherry burst Epiphone Les Paul, which I played for a while."

Following the Epiphone, Clark's arsenal received a more unusual addition. "This Japanese company called Moon made my uncle a recreation of his '48 or '47 L-5 and he gave me that because he wasn't using it. That changed the way I played. I started becoming more of a fingerstyle player with that, and developed some kind of cockamamie technique that way."

Clark is self-deprecating about the development of her playing abilities. Suffice to say, her skills were such that she earned a place at Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music. Like fellow Berklee alum done good John Mayer, she decided that formal musical education wasn't for her.

"I feel that I have these really interesting gaps in my knowledge," she reflects. "Like, I can barely read music, but I could like, analyse and diagram a Mingus chart, y'know what I mean? Like, why do I know this but I can't do that?! I definitely have enough to go like, 'We're going to play this m7b5 and then go to this, and it's modally different'. I have enough to get by. And I have good ears."

The issue that Clark – like many other musicians before her – had with music education, however, is its perhaps unavoidable focus on the quantitative at the expense of the unmeasurable. "The thing that happened at Berklee is that the things they can teach

"I wanted to write a record about people doing the best they could to get by, and I could write the record because I've been almost every one of the characters in it"

you can be helpful to being an artist but they cannot teach you *how* to be an artist," she insists. "And the things they can teach you are quantifiable and can be very athletic. Like, 'Wow, this person is the best hard-rock player in 2021'. But they didn't invent hard rock. Artists did that. The athleticism was definitely rewarded. Being an artist, not so much. Because that's not really something they can teach. Unless you have something to say with the tools that you have honed, it doesn't matter. So that's kind of where I was like, 'I don't know about this place…' It's really good for some people. It absolutely is. But for what I wanted to do, I didn't need any more of it."

Slow Show

With her 2017 tour for *Masseduction*, St Vincent reached new heights in terms of spectacle, theatre and controversy. Clark took to the stage solo and proceeded to perform the entire gig alone, her voice and guitar accompanied by nothing more than a backing track and a surreal multimedia presentation on the screens behind her. *NME* described a London date as, "one of the most divisive gigs of the year" – and you sensed that was rather the point. *Daddy's Home* however, feels like it will have a very different live production and, unsurprisingly, Clark already has an idea of how she's going to tour it, even if sold-out arena gigs still feel way off yet.

"When I was touring *Masseduction*, that's a record that really lends itself to a high-gloss, crazy multimedia experience," she reflects. "Overwhelm the senses, look over here – and that was that kind of album, so it worked. But it was also in the midst of a production arms race for touring bands, I feel. It was like, 'Oh, you don't have a spaceship? Then what are you doing?' But with this record, it really is so much about performance, just people playing music. My hope is that, when we are able to actually come back and play music for people, what people will really want is to just unwind and hear good people play good music, and just play."

It's an interesting observation but one that no doubt fits the general mood of *Daddy's Home*. It makes sense that the live shows should strike a less provocative and confrontational tone when, lyrically, the record eschews the barbed critiques of society that have often been at the core of St Vincent's work, opting instead for empathy directed towards its flawed cast of characters.

"I wanted to write a record about people doing the best they could to get by," says Clark, "and I could write the record because I've been almost every one of the characters in it: I've been the girl on the train looking worse for wear in last night's clothes; I've been the girl at the holiday party; I've been around the block and across the street, as they say. I don't feel particularly interested in condemning anybody or anything. It's more like: life is complicated and people are complicated."

That's never been more true than it is right now, and through its warped 1970s-inspired lounge-act lens, *Daddy's Home* takes all that into account.

"I could study humanity and write about its facets and contradictions for the rest of my life and not get bored," she adds. "But it's probably subconsciously a reaction to the culture we're in now, where algorithms incentivise outrage. We don't want to be ruled by that. We have to make room for compassion and critical thought and empathy, and all those things."

***Daddy's Home* is out now on Loma Vista Records. Preorder the Music Man St Vincent Goldie via music-man.com**

The new St Vincent Goldie features gold foil pickups and a smaller pickguard, giving it a more retro vibe than her previous Music Man models

MAKER'S MARK

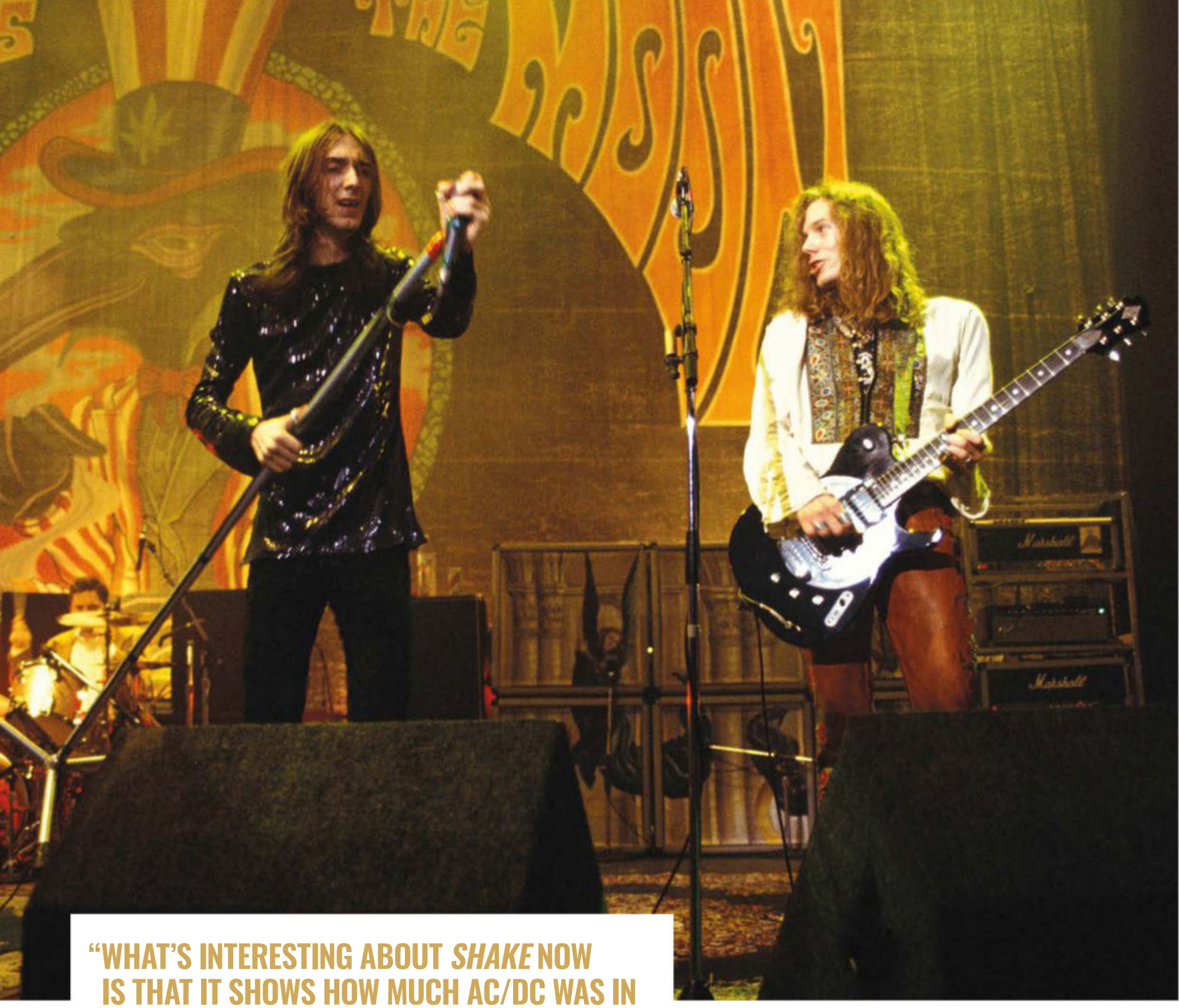
As The Black Crowes' iconic album *Shake Your Money Maker* celebrates its 30th anniversary, we catch up with brothers Rich and Chris Robinson to talk guitars, fights and feuds, and the healing power of songwriting

WORDS RICHARD PURDEN

When The Black Crowes first arrived in early 1990, they possessed a dishevelled swagger comparable to that of Guns N' Roses' introduction to UK audiences at Soho's Marquee three years earlier. Both bands shared a dangerous energy and innocence about the industry that beguiled both audiences and critics from the start. "What's so bad about the Black Crowes?" asked a *Rolling Stone* cover headline in 1991 after the band had been kicked off a ZZ Top tour because its sponsors took issue with Chris Robinson railing against the commercialisation of music on stage. "I never thought I'd be on the cover of the *Atlanta Journal* unless I killed someone," was his memorable response to the story being splashed across the front pages in the fallout. In those words, Chris summed up the edgy appeal that captivated so many back then – but it was far from just talk.

© Paul Natkin / Getty Images

Rich and Chris Robinson, backstage at Chicago's Lincoln Hall, 2020.



"WHAT'S INTERESTING ABOUT *SHAKE* NOW IS THAT IT SHOWS HOW MUCH AC/DC WAS IN THERE IN THE WAY WE APPROACHED RHYTHM"

It was certainly an experience for this writer, watching the band on their second UK tour in 1991, when Chris took issue with someone in the crowd and promptly flew into the pit at the Edinburgh Playhouse, ready for action. "I jumped in the crowd and punched someone," remembers the singer, down the line from Southwest Colorado. "That was near the end of the tour, after 250 shows. This guy was throwing coins at me. I was like, 'Motherfucker!' I swear I saw him laughing with his mate. We were just crazed at this time, like literally almost schizophrenic with the amount of touring. I just had enough and jumped in to smack him, then the crowd turned."

SHAKE IT OFF

Events such as these were a memorable accompaniment to the band's edgy Southern barroom strut. But The Black Crowes weren't short of catchy melodies and hooky riffs either – with a hot streak of singles that included definitive gems such as *Jealous Again* and *She Talks To Angels*, as well as an arresting cover of Otis Redding's *Hard To Handle*. *Shake Your Money Maker*, which was produced by the band's mentor George Drakoulias, went on to sell five million copies and remains one of the most enduring rock 'n' roll debuts of the past three decades.

To celebrate the album's 30th anniversary, the band have put together a new edition of the album, which showcases treasures from the band's vault that have remained unreleased, not least *Charming Mess*, a track that was originally slated to be the record's lead single before being dropped from the album altogether. What happened? Rich isn't sure.

"We had a ton of songs," he says from his home in Nashville. "George was like, 'Keep writing'. I'm not aware of why it didn't end up on the album but one thing I do remember is the intro was pretty much like *Hot Legs*. We didn't want to deal with getting sued and didn't know how the business worked. After deciding to put it out, we wanted to play it for Rod [Stewart] and say, 'Look, this is what we have – it's obviously a tribute,' and he liked the song and gave us his blessing, like, 'Go ahead man, that's great,' which was cool.

"It was George who played us the Faces and Rod's track *Every Picture Tells A Story*, which is one of the most unbelievable songs."

Stewart was one of many singers that gave succour to Chris when finding his voice, particularly on his early Faces work.

"He's incredible on that stuff and he has written some great songs," says Chris. "He's Rod the fuckin' Mod. You have to put him in the same category as Robert Plant and Joe Cocker."

Another nod to British popular music of the era that graces the 30th anniversary edition of *Shake Your Money Maker* is a cover of Humble Pie's *30 Days In The Hole* – a song that The Black Crowes recorded as a way of thumbing their noses to the prevailing mood of Georgian music hipsters at the time

"There was nothing more uncool in 1989 among the bohemians and the Atlanta weirdos around us than 1970s rock," explains Chris. "It was our way of being rebellious and our attitude was, 'This music is cool and you're missing some of the heart and soul of what's going on'. I thought, 'We're not good enough musicians to play this' but we wanted to do it because of our love of [Steve] Marriott and our love of that band".

BACK IN BLACK CROWES

Shake Your Money Maker was propelled by the clang and crunch of guitarists Rich Robinson and Jeff Cease, the latter appearing in promo shots at the time with a Les Paul dangled around his neck while Rich posed with a 1968 blonde Telecaster.

"What's interesting about *Shake* now is that it shows how much AC/DC was in there in the way that we approached rhythm," Chris reflects. "Jeff basically doubled what I played. There wasn't a lot of guitar interplay but that came on leaps and bounds when Marc Ford joined the band on the second record. It was a far more straight-ahead album when it came to that."

That 1992 follow up, *The Southern Harmony And Musical Companion*, captured Ford and Robinson's singular guitar interplay on the double-platinum seller that featured another definitive hit in *Remedy* the memorable promo for which introduced Robinson's Gibson ES-335.

"There's no point in a bunch of dudes standing on stage playing the same chords," says Rich. "It's like a painter; you use different brushes and tools and get in there, that's how you bring dimensions. It's the same for guitarists and guitars. You have a single-coil versus a double-coil, a Filter'Tron solidbody verses a semi-hollow. Every guitar brings a different timbre and sound."

It's a striking fact that 'Young Rich Robinson', as he was then known, came up with the guitar part for the legendary *She Talks To Angels* when he was just 15 years old. The track features as one of two unreleased demos from the band's early incarnation as Mr Crowe's Garden that appears on the reissue, only slightly different from the version you know and love.

"That was the first one I wrote after delving into open tuning," says Rich of the band's signature tune. "I gave it to Chris and he wrote some lyrics. The version on the boxset shows the song in a relatively complete form but it didn't have the bridge or intro yet."

OPPOSITE The brothers Robinson on stage in the UK, 1990

BELOW The Black Crowes performing *Shake Your Money Maker* at West Hollywood's Troubadour, 2019

© Mick Hutson / Redferns • Jeff Kravitz / FilmMagic for LiveNation / Getty Images

"I'VE ALWAYS HAD A THING FOR GRETSCH GUITARS, LISTENING TO GUYS LIKE MALCOLM YOUNG, STEPHEN STILLS, STEVE MARRIOTT"

Once written, the track was shelved for some years. It wasn't until their song bank was cleaned out and presented to Drakoulias that the producer insisted that the cut appear on *Shake Your Money Maker*."

Chris remembers his brother listening to Nick Drake and Stephen Stills around the time the song was written. "He tuned my dad's guitar to open E and [the song] just fell out of the sky," he says. "Songs are just that way."

Patriarch Stan Robinson's 1953 custom-made Martin D-28 used on the original recording was later gifted to Rich. "It was a beautiful guitar that he had from his time playing in a folk band, The Appalachians, during the 1950s and 60s," says Rich. "I didn't have an acoustic at the time and he was happy to loan it to me."

FLOOD DAMAGE

That D-28 has been by Rich's side ever since, and was one of a tragic few instruments to survive when his gear storage was flooded by Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

While Rich is philosophical about the beautiful instruments he lost that day, it's a stroke of fortune that those that helped define his sound on *Shake Your Money Maker* will be able to take their place among the 30 or so that he takes on the road for the rescheduled 30th-anniversary tour later this year.

Key among these are the 1968 Fender Telecaster known as "The Moneymaker" and a Goldtop from the same year, both of which helped determine the band's early tone and continue to be an essential part of his collection.

"The '68 Telecaster I got after I traded it in for a Rickenbacker at a famous bargain store in Atlanta," says Rich. "I thought the Goldtop was a '58 but it turned out to be a '68. The body realistically came from the 50s because a bunch of the bodies were left over when they went back to the original design."

Though damaged in the flood, the latter was one of the few instruments to make a full recovery.

"The Goldtop came out great and sounds better than it ever did. It was baked in a dry room for eight solid months and that got all of the moisture out. Everything was put back together exactly as it was and repainted".

Among the other guitars brought back to life was Rich's 1963 Gibson ES-335. Since 1992, the 335 has become another permanent fixture for the guitarist and, in the aftermath of Sandy, a signature model was created by Gibson. But his love of big guitars with a bit of air in them isn't limited to Gibsons. In 2020, he also received a Gretsch signature model that was his from the ground up.

"I've always had a thing for those guitars, listening to guys like Malcolm Young, Stephen Stills, Neil Young and Steve Marriott," he says. "I always wanted my own Gretsch so I spoke to [Gretsch master builder] Steve Stern. He had built me this amazing White Falcon and I said, 'Let's make a Magpie'. Steve was excited about the idea. We went through the whole process. He was interested in the blue element of the feathers, with the magpie having the blue, black and white. I even got to design the little logo. They made 28 of the custom with the engraved logo, and there's a production model from Japan, which is more affordable but is still a great guitar – I have one here that I play at home."

WRITING RETREAT

While the pandemic led to the cancellation of last year's tour, it also allowed the brothers to start writing.

Their new collection of songs is their first together since 2009's *Before The Frost…Until The Freeze*. The reunion also features Drakoulias, who in addition to being a trusted producer was also the man who originally signed the band to the Def American label. Chris suggests their that relationship "deteriorated for weird reasons" after *Southern Harmony* but is quick to credit Drakoulias for seeing something in the band when others didn't.

"He taught us a work ethic that we still have today and was the one that pushed *Jealous Again* to another place. The only reason we're still talking 30 years later

"WE LOVED OASIS AND WE FELT A KINSHIP WITH THEM. WE SAW THAT THEY WERE TWO BROTHERS THAT TOLD EVERYONE TO FUCK OFF"

is because of the songwriting. We were leaving our amateur status behind; our writing had moved up a notch. Rich and I are good at what we do but without those songs as the vehicle, I don't know what would've happened. George is amazing to work with, it feels like 1989 again."

Since rebuilding their bridges, the trio has rediscovered the alchemy that strengthened their early resolve. "It's been great and this is some of the strongest stuff we've done in years," adds Rich. Some years of silence between the brothers helped clear the air for a return to the song writing values that infused those early works too. "There is that sort of renewed desire to work with one another without all the other shit, the baggage and the distrust. We're in a good place as brothers now and, when we're that way, writing songs always elevates us. For me, Chris is singing better than he has ever sung, the songs are great and I could not be happier with them."

For fans, the reunion once seemed as likely as Noel and Liam letting bygones be bygones and getting Oasis back together. Having toured with the Manchester band in 2002, Rich feels a genuine connection with their counterparts across the pond.

"We loved Oasis and we felt a kinship with them," he says. "We saw that they were two brothers that told everyone to fuck off. They were touring *Standing On The Shoulder of Giants* and there were some great songs on that record. I was listening to *Go Let It Out* the other day, it's a fucking brilliant song. That was one of the most fun tours we had, to go out every night and hear those songs. Noel would get up and play with us and sometimes also Gem or Andy Bell, which was a lot of fun. It was six weeks and we had a tremendous time."

High-spirits were also captured on 2000's *Live At The Greek* with Jimmy Page. While no Crowes tracks feature due to contractual issues, the shows remain another peak for the band. "I was on cloud fucking nine," says Chris, "to play with the architect, one of the greatest guitarists of all time." A sense of joy coming out of the grooves on the record is clear. "It felt great every time we got in a room with Jimmy", adds Rich. "It sounded great, that is always the litmus test, when it's easy like that, then you know it's right."

***Shake Your Money Maker* 30th anniversary editions are out now. The Black Crowes will play rescheduled UK and Ireland tour dates in October. Visit theblackcrowes.com**

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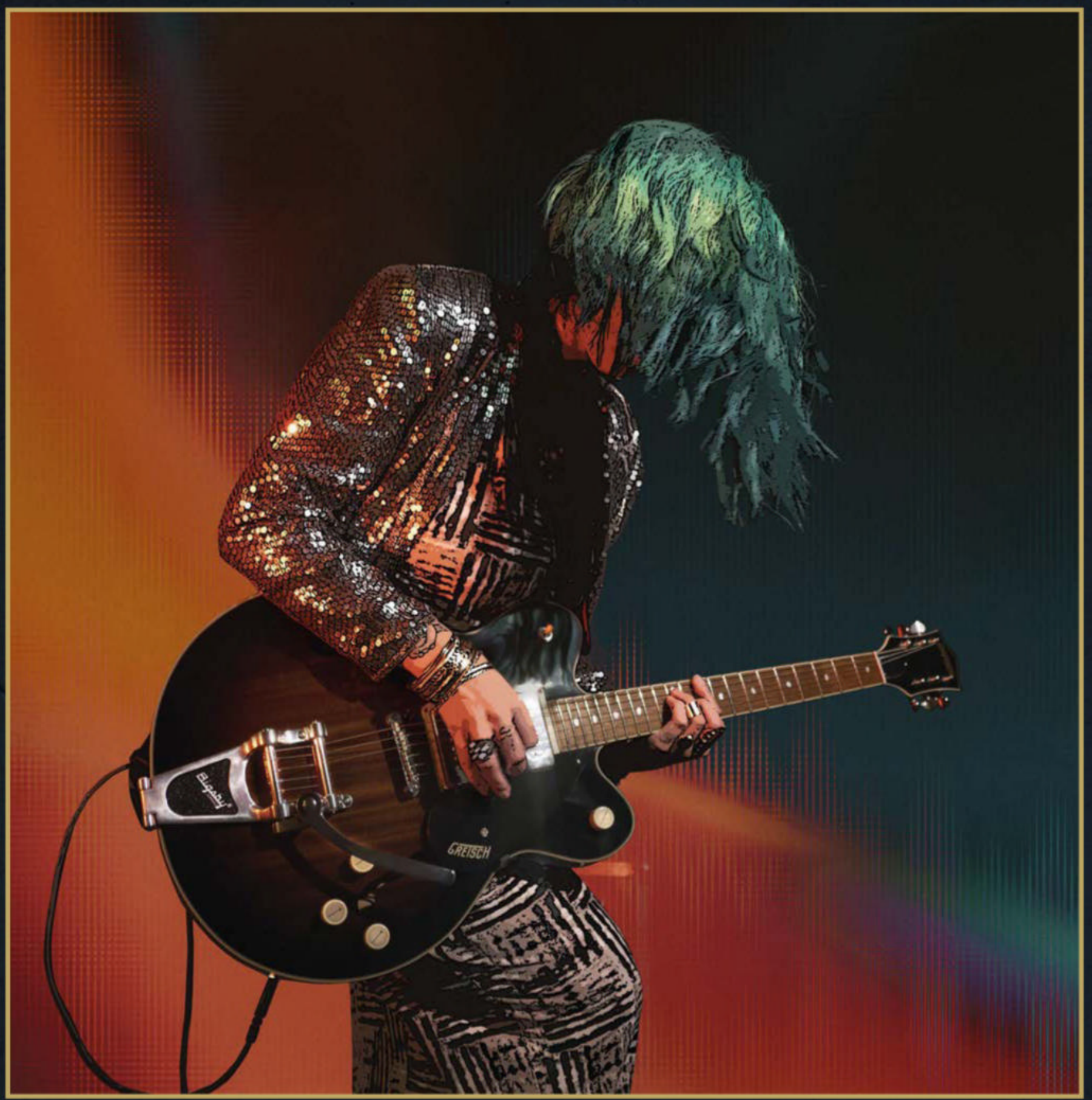

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TALK OF THE TOWN

WORDS ED OLESZKO
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

He's clocked up 13 years as the lead guitarist in The Pretenders, played with Jerry Lee Lewis and The Pogues, and has folk-rock royalty for in-laws, so you'd better believe James Walbourne has some stories to tell. We head to his local to check out the highlights of his well-travelled guitar collection

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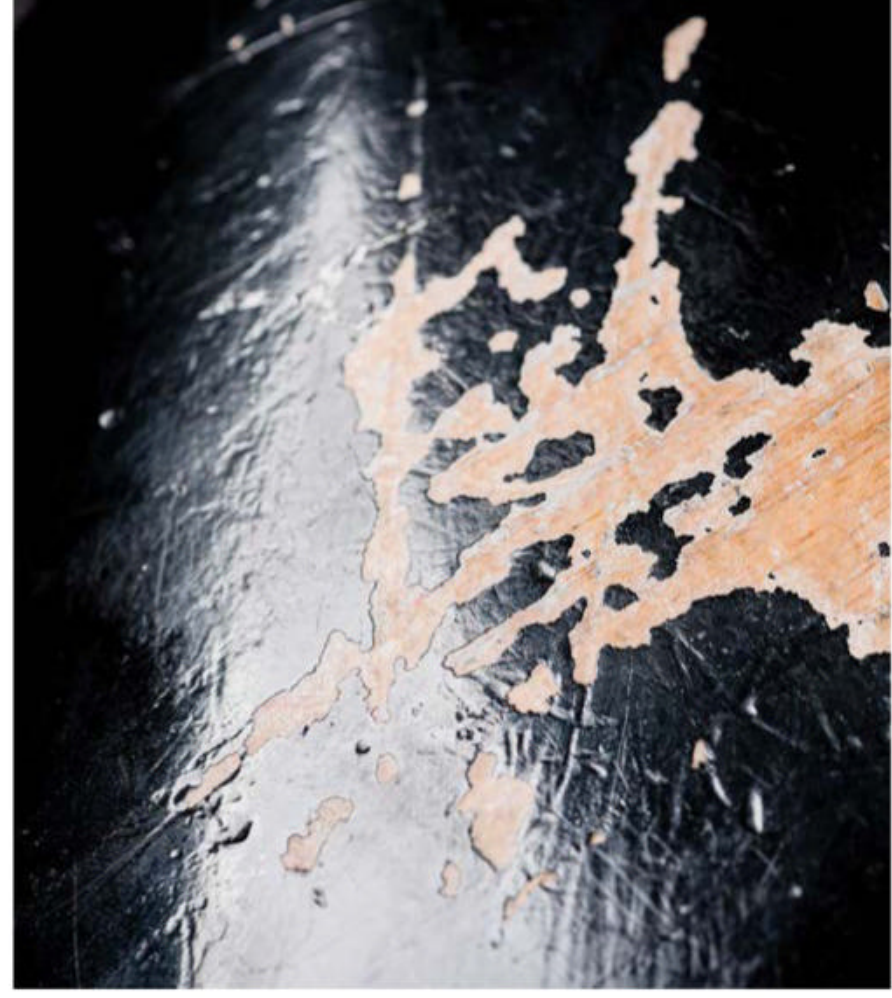
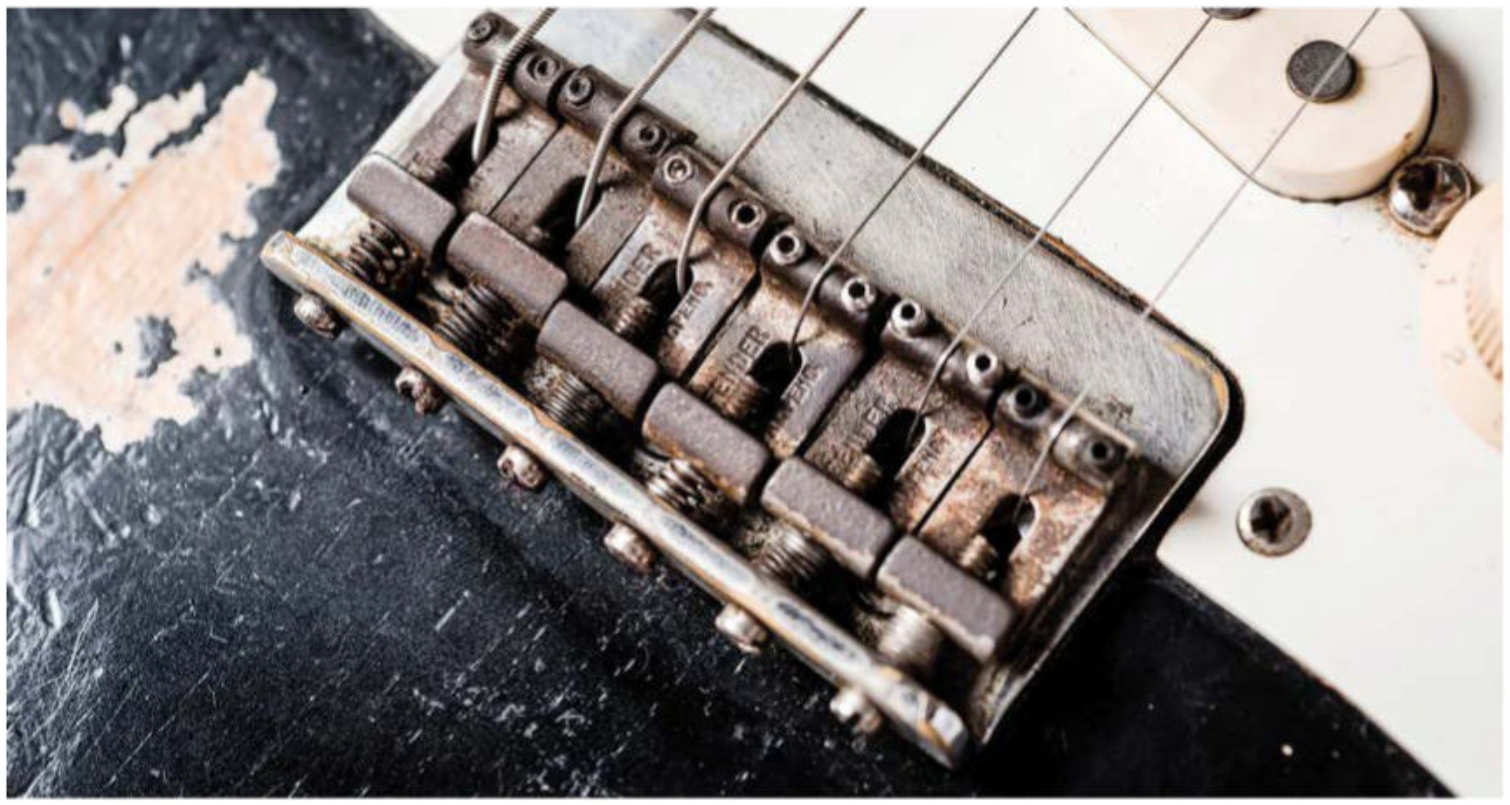


Although officially a Pretender, Londoner James Walbourne is very much the real deal. The lead guitarist in Chrissie Hynde's band since 2008, Walbourne is also one half of The Rails, a folk duo that also features his wife, Kami Thompson. We catch up with James in his local pub, The Boogaloo in Highgate – not just a convenient location to talk gear, swap road stories and photograph his enviable guitar collection but also a significant setting in terms of his career.

"I met [Pretenders drummer and founding member] Martin Chambers in here," James reveals. "I was playing here with a little rock 'n' roll duo most nights of the week. Martin liked my guitar playing and invited me down to the studio one day for the *Break Up The Concrete* sessions and we went from there. That would have been around 2008."

Soon after, James hit the road with the band. Opening up a case with as many battle scars as



James Walbourne's black Strat, beautifully weathered and made from various 1950s and 60s parts, was a gift from Chrissie Hynde

the guitar it contains, he tells us about the black Stratocaster that has become his main stage guitar. "This guitar was a gift from Chrissie Hynde and I absolutely love it," he says. "I think it's a 1957 but it's a bit of a 'bitsa', made from parts from various 1950s and 60s guitars. It has that classic Strat tone: great clean and expansive when driven hard."

Though the guitar came courtesy of Chrissie, its origins beyond that remain something of a mystery.

"One day at a rehearsal, Chrissie turned up with this Strat that she got from her lockup and didn't know she had – no idea where or when she got it,"

This 1952 Gibson LG-2 was used extensively on Chrissie Hynde's recent Bob Dylan covers album

says James. "So I started playing it, and then started playing it more and more at gigs, and then one day there was a drunken sort of, 'You may as well just have that Strat; I'm never going to use it'.

"I said, 'I can't accept that'. But one night after a few drinks I did. That was back in 2008 and we were on tour somewhere. Fair play to her, she did give it to me, and I cherish that guitar, it's one of my favourites. For the Pretenders stuff like *Back On The Chain Gang* and the more Strat-y songs that Robbie McIntosh played on, that guitar really suits. Some of the bluesier stuff, like *My City Was Gone*, I also play on that guitar. I do change it around a bit but it's definitely one of the main two guitars I use with The Pretenders, on stage and in the studio."

When we enquire about his other main squeeze, James reaches for another road case that bears the scars and airline stickers from countless world tours. Inside? A gorgeous 1963 SG Junior in Cherry.

"I never thought I'd end up with an SG as my main guitar," he admits. "But after using one for the *Break Up The Concrete* sessions back in 2008, I felt I had to have one. I found this particular guitar on Denmark Street and it's become my number one.

One P-90 pick-up, tone and volume – what could go wrong?"

STAGE SOUND

When playing live with The Pretenders, Walbourne's rig is as unpretentious as the music it fuels. His stage amps are a pair of modern Fender '68 Custom Deluxe Reverbs. "Straight out the box, I thought they sounded great," he says. "In recent years, I prefer using smaller amps and driving them – my Marshall days might be behind me! These are just like 20 watts each but they sound fantastic cranked. I use a 1965 black-panel in the studio but these reissues – a gift from Fender – are fantastic. I use them on pretty similar settings but we pan them for stereo sounds live so I can be loudest of all!"

When it comes to pedals, James tries to use as few as possible. "I need something that breaks the sound up a little bit, a distortion maybe," he says. "I like the Z.Vex Box Of Rock. Then, for something that makes it maybe one louder than that, I've got the Strymon Riverside. What I like about Strymons is that you can program it all in there, and every night it's the same sound. Other than that, I use just a subtle bit of delay on some stuff."

James' 1963 SG Jr was bought from a store on Denmark Street following work on The Pretenders' *Break Up The Concrete*

Recreating the iconic tones of those early Pretenders cuts, however, also requires the use of what James describes as the "dreaded" chorus pedal. "I use the Strymon Mobius, which I actually quite like now," he admits. "A guilty pleasure. There you go – sue me!"

On stage, The Pretenders have a very simple set-up. "Guitars, bass, drums, keys, that's it," says James. "Chrissie uses her blue Telecaster into a couple of Ampegs or Fenders that are placed offstage. She has a chorus pedal her that tech sometimes hits but her rhythm sound is very clean, punchy and dynamic."

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When asked about the key ingredient to the band's sound, James is quick to credit to Hynde. "It's all her fantastic rhythm playing," he says. "She just makes it *go*. It's the engine! Without her we can play but it's nothing without her driving force."

It seems that the same goes for the band's creative process too. "As a songwriter, she's so prolific," he adds. "When we wrote [2020 album] *Hate For Sale*, she'd email me lyrics that are her own unique take on the world – her worldview in song – and I'd plug in a guitar and come up with different musical ideas and send them back to her. Then we'd get together afterwards and sort of polish it up."

BACK CATALOGUE

In addition to The Pretenders, James has performed with a dazzling array of artists over the years. As well as working with the likes of Peter Bruntnell, Pernice Brothers, Son Volt, Ray Davies and Edwyn Collins, he even recorded with Jerry Lee Lewis.

"That was an amazing experience," says James. "It was all live. He'd just nod at you when it was time for a guitar solo – and you'd better not mess up!"

He has also toured with The Pogues, a story that, like his time with The Pretenders, began right here in The Boogaloo. "I met Shane [MacGowan] drinking in this very pub," reveals James. "We've had some great times – but I won't go into too much detail…"

As you might expect, one of the results of such a diverse CV is that James has amassed a fascinating array of instruments along the way while searching for textures and tones. "My friend Creston Lea made me this guitar" he tells us, pulling out a florally adorned 2009 T-style electric equipped with P-90s and a Bigsby. "The paintwork is by the artist Sarah Ryan. Definitely the coolest looking guitar I own and it plays great."

He also owns a 1965 Non-Reverse Firebird refinished in black that was bought from former Oasis guitarist Gem Archer. "We used to work in the same music shop many years ago," James explains. "He keeps trying to buy it back it's going nowhere! He modified the pickups somehow, I don't know how, but it just sounds great. I love the tremolo on this one and it's great fun to play. It actually sounds amazing clean as well as driven. It's a versatile guitar, I played it on a bunch of country stuff. I was playing with Son Volt in North Carolina somewhere, and halfway through the set the guitar tech said, 'It's not great news, the Firebird's had it, headstock clean off!'

ABOVE Try as he might, Gem Archer is unlikely to get this '65 Non-Reverse Firebird back. "It's going nowhere!" says James

ABOVE LEFT A 1958 reissue Telecaster that Walbourne uses as a backup

I think I played the rest of the set in shock. But some guy fixed it up the very next day with some mystical boat glue or something, and it's been amazing ever since".

Another rather arresting favourite that James describes as "amazing for early rock 'n' roll stuff" is his Harmony Roy Smeck 7208 model, sold through Montgomery Ward mail order catalogues in the early 1960s. Featuring a maple top, a pair of DeArmond pickups and a distinctive lightning bolt pickguard, it's retro chic at its finest with, James notes, a "surprisingly playable and great-feeling neck".

Further highlights include a couple of vintage-reissue Fenders that James uses as his backup guitars, again kindly gifted to him by Fender.

"I was sceptical of reissues for years as I never thought they matched up to instruments made in the '50s and '60s," he says. "But Fender have really gotten their act together in recent years and my 1958 reissue will give most old Teles a run for their money. I put a couple a couple of Tom Brantley custom pickups in this one to give it a slightly beefier tone. There's also a 1965 Stratocaster reissue, which is my main backup for the black Strat. Like the Tele, it's a great guitar."

ON THE RAILS

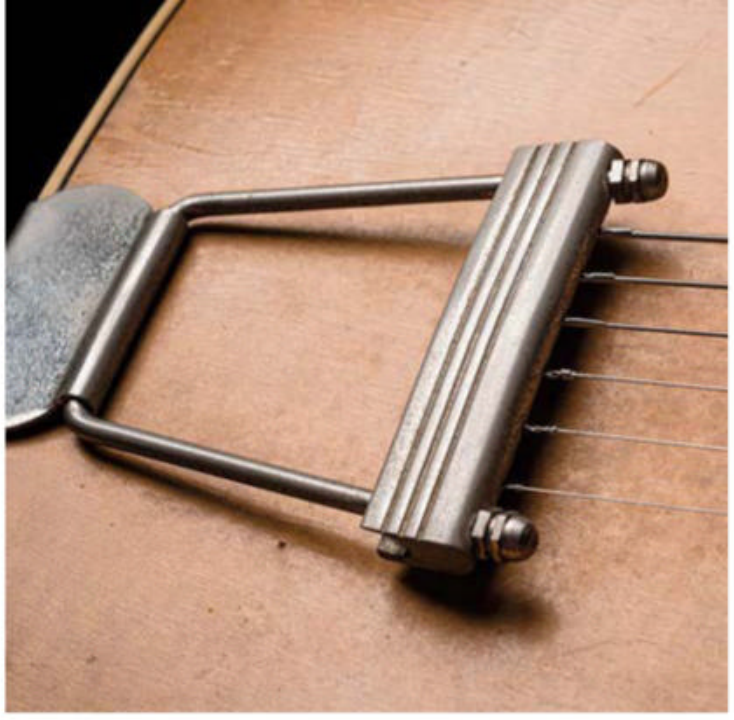
James met Kami Thompson – daughter of folk-rock royalty Richard and Linda Thompson – following a chance meeting at a recording session. The pair went on to marry and formed The Rails in 2013, blending intricate dual vocal harmonies with James's swashbuckling rock 'n' roll playing.

"We recorded the first album at Edwyn Collins' place," he says. "For the second album we went to Nashville and worked with a bunch of top musicians over there, and the latest album [2019's *Cancel The Sun*] we did with Stephen Street in London."

With three albums under their belts, The Rails continue to tour around other commitments. James admits that creating music alongside such a rich vein of familial talent is rewarding but, unsurprisingly, playing guitar with father-in-law Richard Thompson is an equally enriching and grounding experience. "He's simply just utterly amazing, incredible touch," says James. "He's just superb."

Like all working musicians, for James, the effects of the pandemic have been challenging. "We were just about to go away on tour up until Christmas," he says. "It all got cancelled, everything just stopped."

Created by Creston Lea and decorated by artist Sarah Ryan, James describes this Tele-style guitar as the coolest-looking instrument he owns

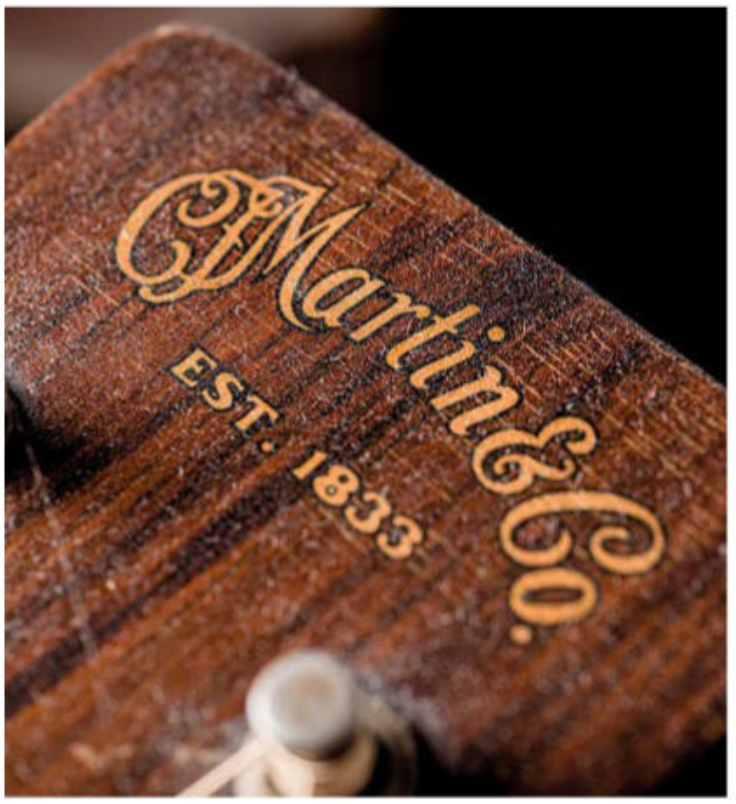


While many others have spent their lockdowns catching up on boxsets, James and Chrissie Hynde instead recorded a series of Bob Dylan covers, recently released as an LP entitled *Standing In The Doorway: Chrissie Hynde Sings Bob Dylan*.

"Dylan released *Murder Most Foul* out of nowhere and that totally blew our minds," says James. "We decided to put something together. I've got a basic Logic setup at home so it would usually start with me playing either a guitar or piano track and sending it to Chrissie. She doesn't have a recording setup at home, so she would listen to the track through headphones on her iPad, then use her iPhone as a mic to record vocals. It was an eye-opener as to what you can achieve at home. We sent it to master mixer Tchad Blake to add some magic and it sounds amazing."

On the LP, James plays primarily acoustic guitar and piano, along with some mandolin. "Guitar-wise, I used what I had at home: my 1952 Gibson LG-2 and my 1948 Martin 0-18, which my mother-in-law bought for me. An incredible 'welcome to the family' present! Those two guitars sound old, woody and small. I also used my 2009 J-45, which works for everything – it's just a road warrior, a cannon!"

Quizzed about his future plans, James remains philosophical. "The thing about this pandemic is it makes you reassess a lot of things. What are you in it for? Do you want to go on tour for eight months? The hamster wheel of recording and touring is huge fun but can be tiring. I love going out just the two of us with The Rails, and I'm getting together a rock 'n' roll duo with a drummer friend called His Lordship,



ABOVE This 1948 Martin 0-18 was a gift from James' mother-in-law, Linda Thompson

OPPOSITE With its lightning bolt scratchplate and DeArmond pickups, this Harmony Roy Smeck not only looks the part but sounds it too

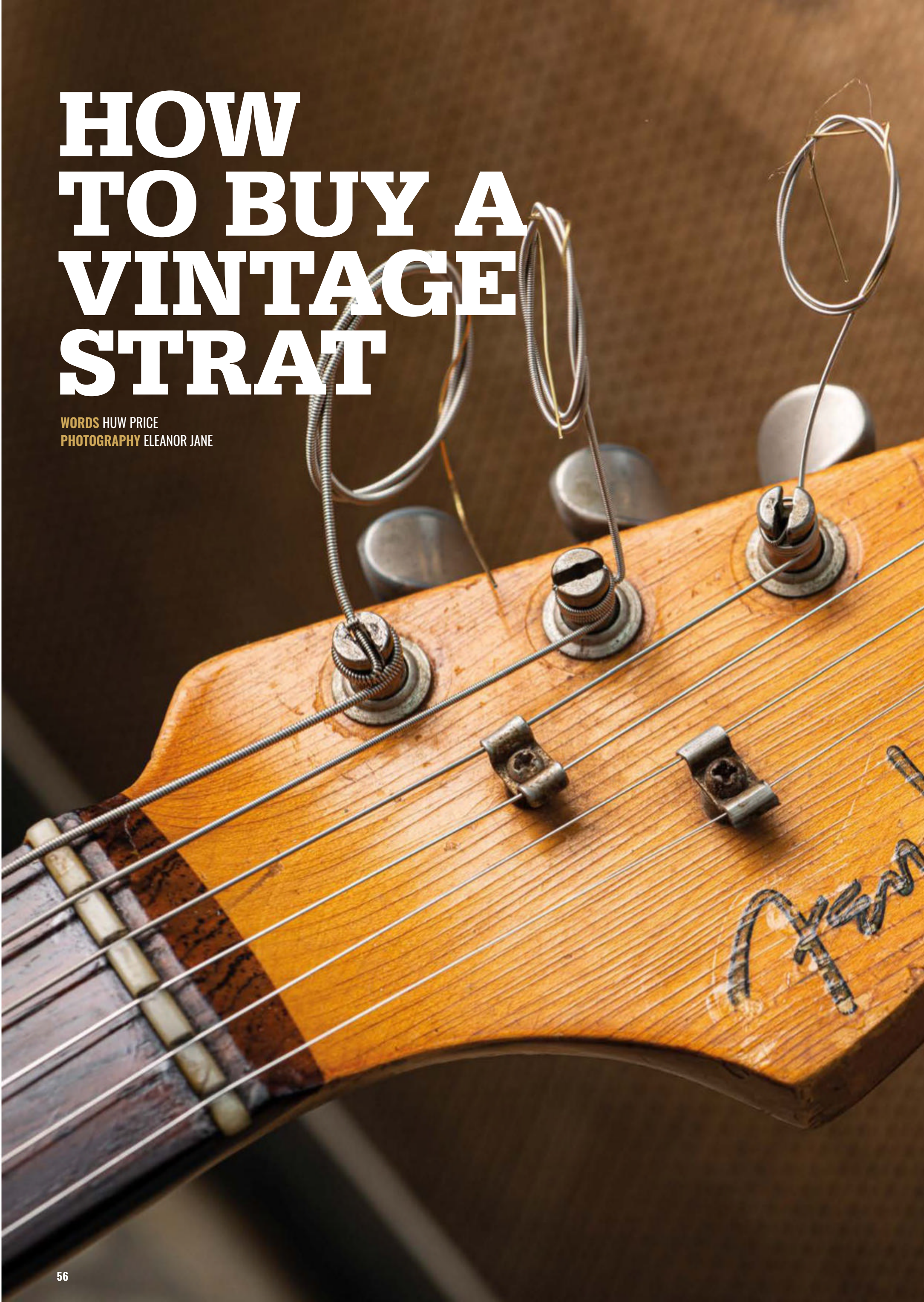
for which I'll use the Roy Smeck guitar exclusively. That'll be loads of fun – it's just got the perfect vibe and sound for that kind of music. We have a track coming out in the next few months called *I'm So Bored Of Being Bored*."

Ultimately, James is in it to make new music. "I'm really excited about the Dylan album coming out, and The Rails have got some great gigs supporting Robert Plant coming up soon too. I can't wait to get back to playing live." Neither can we.

Visit jameswalbourne.co.uk for more

HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE STRAT

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE



Many of us dream of owning a vintage Fender Stratocaster but distinguishing Relics and fakes from the real deal requires an in-depth knowledge of timelines, manufacturing processes and arcane details. Here's our guide to authenticating vintage Strats

The demand for vintage Stratocasters has never been higher, and neither have the prices. Authenticating these guitars is also fairly complex and even if you can verify the constituent parts, there's no guarantee that they all left the Fender factory on the same day and on the same guitar.

Ideally a vintage Strat will come with provenance, and perhaps photographs taken over the decades, but it's rarely the case. Serial numbers cannot be relied on without corroborating evidence, and it's important to check if all the features correspond with the supposed manufacturing date.

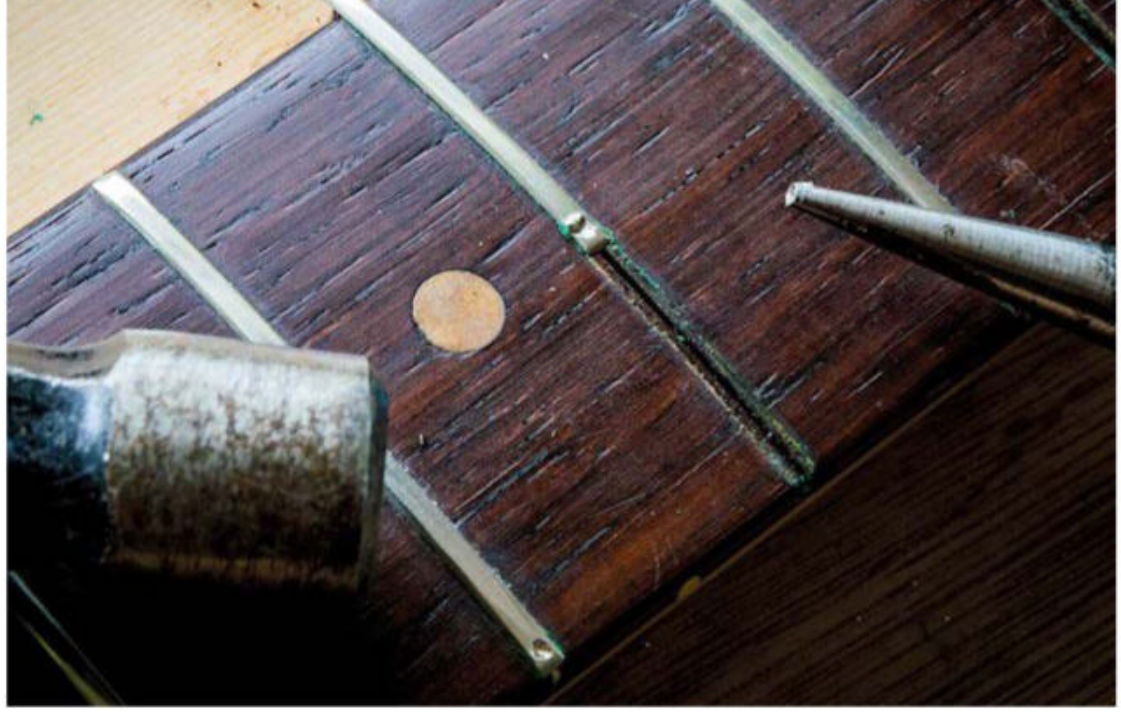
From a player's perspective, so long as you are clear about what you're buying and the guitar is priced accordingly, there's nothing wrong with 'assembled' or refinished vintage Strats. But whether you are in the market for a player-grade example, an all-original collector's piece or simply searching for vintage parts for restoration purposes, this guide will help you identify the key features.

NECK CONSTRUCTION

The 'one-piece' maple necks of 1954-59 have truss rods installed via a channel routed in the back. A strip of walnut was used to fill the channel, with a walnut plug on the front of the headstock.

In 1958, Stratocaster necks acquired slab rosewood fretboards and front-loaded truss rods with no walnut strip or plug. The maple's upper surface was left flat and the fretboard was radiused after being glued on top. The slab should just skim the top of the trussrod nut hole and if there's any maple between the hole and the join line, the neck probably isn't genuine.

Fender introduced veneer or round-lam fretboards in July 1962, with thin rosewood glued over radiused maple. The earliest veneers were the thickest and Fender retained veneer 'boards throughout the



TOP The 'one-piece' maple necks of 1954-59 have truss rods installed from the back with a walnut strip to fill the channel

BOTTOM Heavily worn original Fender frets should be removed as they were installed – sideways. Chips around the frets are evidence that they've likely been replaced

remainder of the vintage era. Neck dates at the body end were pencilled on up to 1962 and stamped from 1962 onwards. It's also worth noting that Fender stopped dating necks for a brief period in 1959.

Pre-CBS rosewood 'boards had 'clay' dots but there's no consensus on the actual material Fender used. They may appear grey, slightly beige, brown or off-white depending on condition and playwear. 1964 and 1965 necks may have clay or celluloid dots, but celluloid quickly became standard. Maple fretboards remained available by special order after 1958, but they were glued on like rosewood slab 'boards.

Fender installed frets sideways and they should really come out the same way. If you see chips around the frets, they're probably replacements. Look for sharpened tangs on the treble side – they should appear thinner than the bass side if they're original.

Router templates were used to cut the neck outline and they were secured using pins. If you're assessing a vintage neck, look for pin holes under the D tuner and on the heel. Also look for a mark on the underside of the heel, like it has been punched with a crosshead screwdriver.

Some vintage-style necks manufactured in Japan can look very similar to 1950s and 60s American necks. If in doubt, remove the truss-rod adjustment nut and see if an American-sized nut will fit. Japanese nuts are metric, so they are incompatible with imperial threads.

NECK PROFILES

Neck profiles vary, but there are some general guidelines. Between 1954 and 1956, Strat necks were quite full and rounded. In 1956, Fender refined the profile to a soft V, which became a harder V in 1957. The V-necks are often quite full, but slimmer examples can be found. The V shape softened towards the end of 1957 and in 1958 changed to a slimmer D-profile, which was retained through 1959 after the rosewood 'board was introduced. The profile became a thinner C for 1960 and the C filled out later in 1961. Early veneer necks feel quite chunky compared to 1960 and 1961 examples. The veneer thinned in 1963, with the necks feeling slimmer too, but they started to thicken up again in 1964 and had less of a taper.

HEADSTOCK HEADS-UP

The necks on Stratocasters and Jazzmasters are interchangeable, and since Jazzmaster headstocks are both longer and wider than a Strat's, some have been reshaped and given reproduction decals. If this has been done competently, conversions are hard to spot.

All Strats had just one string tree until 1972, although it's common to see evidence of second trees having been added retrospectively to vintage Strats. Round trees were used until late 1956, when Fender switched to the 'butterfly' design. A metal spacer

ABOVE By 1966, Stratocaster headstocks were considerably larger than they were earlier in the decade

LEFT Many decals show evidence of oxidisation as the gold turns green, just like the paint on a Les Paul Goldtop

was introduced in 1959, which changed to nylon in 1964. Pay attention to those walnut truss-rod plugs. The vintage ones tended to be short and stubby. Most Japanese necks and USA reissues look elongated in comparison.

DEVIL IN THE DECALS

Vintage decals were applied over the lacquer and if you run your finger across the gold lettering, you should feel a raised surface. That's because the originals were silkscreened, and modern replicas feel smooth and flat.

The gold contained metallic particles that tend to darken and green with age – just like a Les Paul Goldtop. Although some vintage decals look bright and new, most show some oxidisation.

Also check that the decal's patent numbers match up with the supposed year of the neck. From 1954 until 1960 there were no numbers, then two numbers featured on the bottom of the decal from 1961 to 1962. A third patent number was added from 1963 until late 1964, when the 'transitional' logo appeared. The black 'synchronised tremolo' logo was introduced in 1967.

TOP Under the hood of this 1963 example, the aluminium shield plate remains fresh and shiny, with three original black-bottomed pickups that still have rubber tube spacers

BOTTOM LEFT This '63 Olympic White Strat retains its red fibreboard shim and the shadow of the paint stick that Fender used to hold the bodies can be seen in the neck pocket

BOTTOM RIGHT The grain pattern and colour of the wood indicate that this is an ultra-rare example of a korina-bodied Strat in Surf Green

BODY CONSTRUCTION

There were considerable variations during the period from 1954-1970. The overwhelming majority of Strat bodies were ash or alder. Mahogany, sassafras and korina were used too, but examples are extremely rare. Ash was standard until the latter half of 1956, when Fender changed to alder.

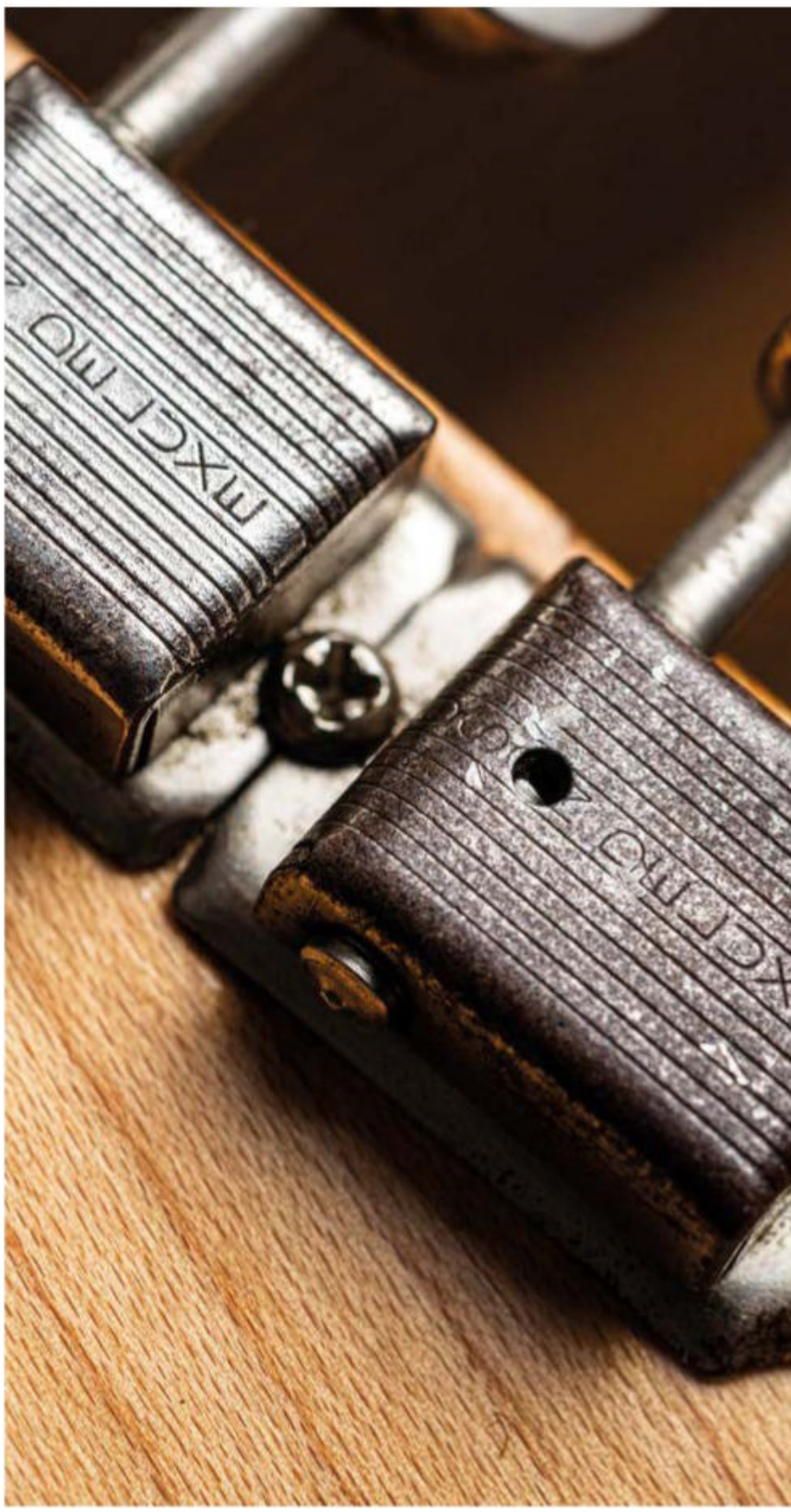
Ash continued to be used under translucent blonde finishes, such as Mary Kaye models, and some sunbursts. It's occasionally seen under custom colours too. With sunburst and blonde finishes, you may find a pencil date in the spring cavity or pickup routs.

Over the years, Fender changed various things under the pickguard. For the earliest rosewood-'board models, Fender retained the single-ply pickguard with eight screws. The three-ply celluloid 'guard with 11 holes was introduced around mid-1959, and a shoulder was added in the control cavity behind the switch to accommodate an extra screw.

The pickup routs also acquired a squarer look towards the end of the 1960s and body contours varied. The rear comfort contour was far wider on pre-CBS Strats, extending further onto the upper horn. For a period staring around 1956, the upper edge of the ribcage contour and the rear edge of the forearm contour are very thin. Strat bodies gradually began bulking up from late 1963 onwards.

Vintage-era bodies also have filled holes; two each on the front and back. Fender's routing templates had locating pins to secure them onto the body blanks. When the template was lifted off, the 1/8" diameter holes were filled with dowel and then levelled.

They're easiest to spot on stripped bodies but even through lacquer, the dowel outlines can usually be seen and the dowels are always in exactly the same place. On the front they'll be close to the pickguard screw hole that's adjacent to the bass side of the neck pocket and about 20mm from the body edge, somewhere between the strap button and jack plate. On the back they're about 22mm from the bass side of the neck plate and 20mm from the body edge, almost directly in line behind the vibrato block cavity's treble side. If you can't see them, consider it a warning.



Strat bodies that date from before the autumn of 1964 should have three or four 1/16" nail holes on the front. Fender used the nails as spacers when spraying. Check near the neck pocket next to the jack plate's outer screw, and between the bridge and bridge pickup cavity on the bass side. You'll see them on stripped bodies too, but if the finish is supposed to be original and there are no nail holes, something is amiss.

PAINT JOBS

Until 1968, most vintage-era Strats had nitrocellulose finishes but there are exceptions, including the sparkle finishes and many of the custom colours, which were acrylic with nitro top coats. From 1955, unless they were blonde, Fender stained bodies yellow before finishing – irrespective of the intended colour.

From 1955, Fender used a sealer called Homoclad and from 1963 it applied a clear polyester sealer coat called Fullerplast that's easy to see under the top coats. If you can see grey primer under the colour coats, you can assume it's a refinish.

Always check the neck pocket. If the guitar predates 1963, you can expect to see paint covering the neck cavity. In 1963, Fender began fixing a 'paint stick' to the bass side of the pocket, which shielded that area from the finish. When authenticating vintage finishes, blacklighting has its uses, but you're more likely to discover what a finish isn't rather than confirm what it is, and it cannot confirm the originality of a finish. It can show up repairs and overspray, but many refinishes are decades-old and glow like 1950s and 60s finishes.

SUM OF ITS PARTS

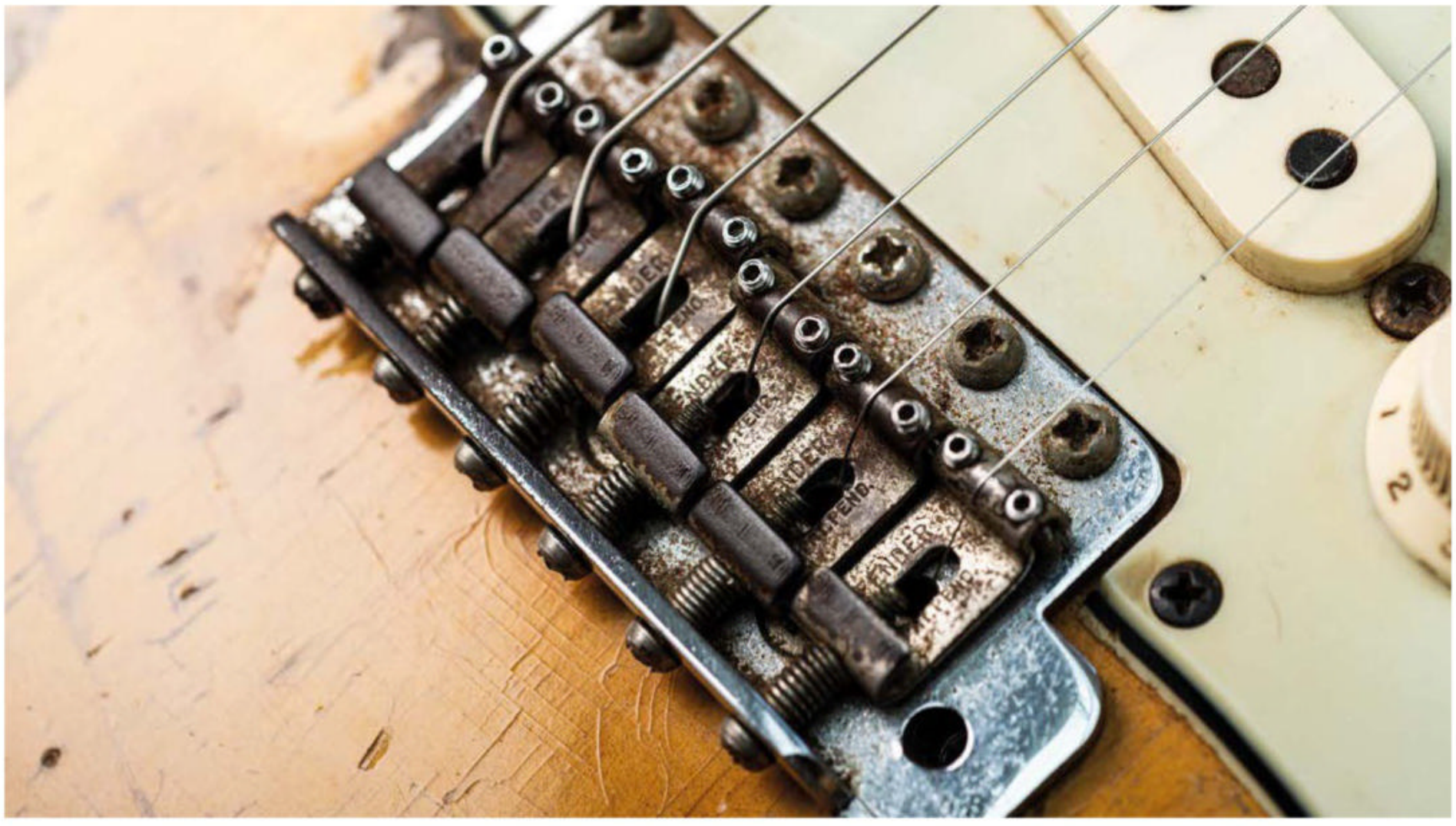
Kluson tuners were standard from 1954 until late 1967, when Fender-branded tuners were introduced. Until 1956, Kluson tuners had no lettering on the rear casing. From 1956 until 1964, single-line tuners had the word 'deluxe' stamped along the centre. This changed to a double-line 'Kluson deluxe' stamp in 1964. You can usually distinguish reproduction tuners because the casing is deeper and the gear washer will be nylon rather than metal. The rear plates had 'pat applied' stamps until 1958, and thereafter had patent number stamps.

Until 1970, Stratocaster bridge saddles were made from pressed steel and had 'pat pend' stamps. Look for tooling marks that appear like scratches on the flat area above the intonation screw hole. The grouping is always the same and you should look for

TOP LEFT A particularly vivid original Candy Apple Red finish that looks good enough to eat from ATB Guitars

BOTTOM LEFT This battle-scarred 1963 Stratocaster belongs to English guitarist Eddie Tatton. See more of his collection at Guitar.com

RIGHT Single-line Kluson tuners arrived in 1956 and were used until 1964



ABOVE Vintage bridge saddles with telltale tooling marks

RIGHT Unlike Telecaster pickups, Strat pickups always had staggered polepieces

a smaller group dead centre – assuming they're not too badly corroded. Look for rough edges on bridge plates because repros tend to be smooth. The vibrato block should be steel, so a magnet will stick to it, and you can test if a USA vibrato arm with an imperial thread will screw in. The spring claw should measure 2 inches across at its widest point.

PLASTICS FANTASTIC

Vintage-era pickguards fall into three categories, but there are subtle variations within that. The single-ply 1/16" thick white plastic pickguard came first, with eight screw holes. The sides look rough and the edges are soft rather than sharp, suggesting they were punched rather than cut out. A small metal shield plate was placed between the 'guard and the controls and from 1955, the undersides are shiny.

Three-ply celluloid 'guards were introduced in 1959, along with a full-size, thin aluminium shield. The earliest had eight screw holes, then 10 before Fender settled on 11, with one screw situated between the middle and neck pickups. In 1963, this screw was moved closer to the middle pickup. Then, in 1965, Fender introduced a white three-ply plastic pickguard.

Besides the spokeless and slightly marbled 'tall boy' knobs and 'football' switch tips of early 1954 Strats, the plastics didn't change much in appearance. However, Fender changed materials, which means they aged differently.

From later in 1954 to 1956 Fender used polystyrene – never Bakelite – which tends to stay white, but can be brittle. Pickup covers often suffer badly with this, even falling to pieces, and control-knob edges tend to round over.

In late 1956, Fender phased in a different plastic that was tougher but tended to yellow or brown with heavy use. Some 1957 Strats have a mixture of parts, with yellowed pickup covers and whiter knobs, or vice versa. This appears to have lasted until around 1963, when Fender again altered the formula for a lighter and creamier look.

All the knobs had three spokes and were designed for split-shaft pots. It's seemingly impossible to find truly accurate repros and you'll spot fakes if you compare the numbers with genuine vintage knobs. Ironically, some Japanese manufacturers got their numbers right, but the lettering looks wrong.

Pickup covers are harder to verify without doing a lot of research on the moulding marks found on the undersides but unfortunately, they're easier to fake than knobs.

ELECTRONICS

Thanks to manufacturer codes and date stamps found on the casings, potentiometers can provide clues to a Stratocaster's age. Besides solid-shaft 100k units found on the very earliest Strats, Fender used 250k Stackpole and CTS pots. Stackpole and CTS units have 304 and 137 codes respectively. Year and week stamps followed the manufacturer codes, but Fender bought components in bulk, so potentiometers are often older than the guitar itself – or younger if they are vintage replacements.

When it came to tone capacitors, Fender used paper/foil ZNW1P1 'phone book' 0.1uF capacitors until 1961, so-called because of their appearance. The earliest were orange, becoming a lighter shade in 1958. From 1961 Fender used 0.1uF ceramic disc capacitors and the value changed to 0.05uF around the time of the CBS takeover.

Cloth-covered wire was used until the late 1960s and Fender's wiring style was neat and tidy, with the ground wire from the spring claw connected directly to the jack socket. If the wiring appears messy, it has probably been modified or repaired.

Collectors look for original solder joints throughout because it's an indication that the guitar's finish may be original. After all, you can't respray a body without removing the electronics. Fresh solder joints look shiny, but there are ways to make them look old.

The cloth covering can also be pulled back sufficiently to allow fresh solder joins to be made and then concealed so that all the original solder joints remain undisturbed. Some unscrupulous individuals have gone this far to pass off refinishes as original.

All vintage switches were three-way units made by CRL. Between 1954 and 1962 Fender used the CRL 1452 with three stamped serial numbers and a brown wafer with flat cut sides. From 1963 to 1965, the wafer was a lighter shade with a rounded half-moon shape, and between 1965 and 1973 the centre wheel was changed to white plastic. Many post-'65 switches also have a diamond logo.

Finally, when it came to pickups, Fender used black vulcanised fibreboard flats until early 1964, when the bottom flats became grey. Unlike Telecasters, Strats had staggered pole slugs from the start. The 1954 stagger had a G slug shorter than the D, but they were quickly evened up.

Slug diameter changed too, from 0.2" in 1954 to 0.192" and then 0.187" in 1963. Alnico V replaced alnico III magnets in 1955 and in 1960 the polarity changed from north up to south up – you can check this using a compass.

The magnet wire changed from copper-coloured heavy formvar to a purple plain-enamel wire during 1964, and resistance readings dropped from the low 6k to high 5k range. Vintage coils were potted in molten wax containing lamp black, so vintage coils and the cloth wiring close to the pickup tend to look rather dirty.

FURTHER READING

Still hungry for more on vintage Stratocasters? Head to Guitar.com to check out the breathtaking collection of original custom-colour Fenders that guitar historian Martin Kelly and Seven Decades founder Phil Hylander shared with us, which also provides plenty of info about some of Fender's rarest finishes.

And if you're looking for some vintage buying inspiration, Huw Price's restoration of Chris Buck's 1962 Strat – spotted in a house clearance auction in South Wales in a sorry state, but carefully brought back to its former glory – will have you combing auction sites in the hope of coming across your own hidden gem. Good luck!

ABOVE This gorgeous 1965 Sonic Blue Strat is owned by Seven Decades founder Phil Hylander. The amp's not bad either. Check out the full collection at Guitar.com

INVENTION OR EVOLUTION?

JHS Pedals main man Josh Scott continues his adventure through the history of guitar effects by talking about... hang on a minute... amps?!

WORDS JOSH SCOTT

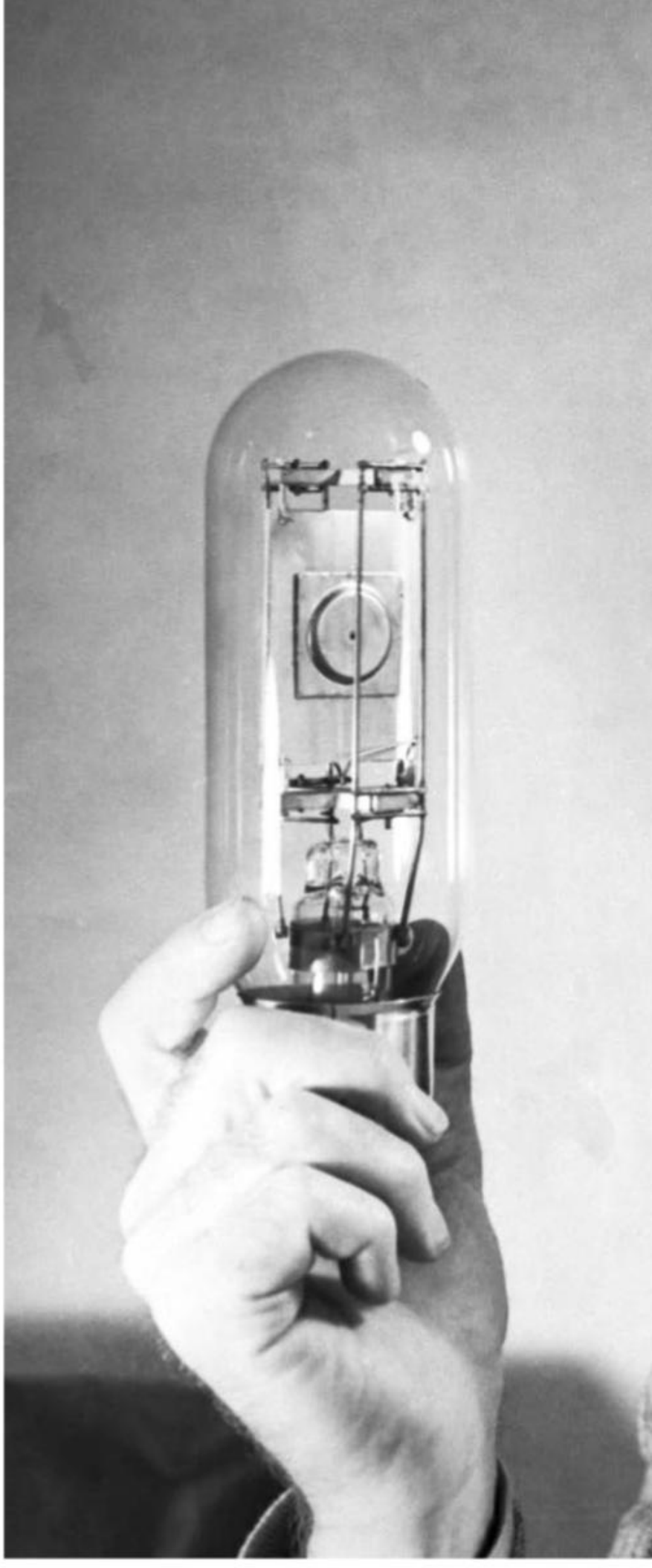
Out of the dozens of amplifiers I own, there's one that stands out. It's the definition of perfect, and in its own way, it might well be the most important amplifier ever made. I know what you're thinking, "Whoa there, Josh – I thought you were the effects guy? And I thought this column was about guitar effects?! You need to stay in your lane there, buddy, get back on script!"

I hear ya, weirdly intense imaginary reader, but put away those pitchforks for a second and consider this: amps might not be effects, but they're an absolutely pivotal part of the story of electric guitars. Arguably *the most important part*. Why? Because without an amp, you can't hear the guitar, and because if the right amplifiers hadn't been invented at just the right time, guitar would never have become popular music's greatest weapon.

To appreciate how radically different things could have been, you have to understand the pre-1960s world of guitar, an era that had never seen a fuzz pedal, The Beatles or flower power. There was a blissful innocence to every guitar, amplifier and piece of gear made before the 60s. It was like watching a child grow with only the concerns of exploration and adventure in mind. In the 50s, guitar was simply an instrument, a way to make chords and melody, but the 60s would soon make it a weapon of mass social deconstruction. The electric guitar was transitioning from an experiment to a successful and dominant force, and the evolving amplifier was its voice in the crowd. The evolution of the amplifier is essential to the evolution of guitar and today we need to dive deep into how it all started. We need time travel back to 1809, so I'm going to quote my good friend Samuel L Jackson here: "Hold onto your butts".

ORIGIN OF SPECIES

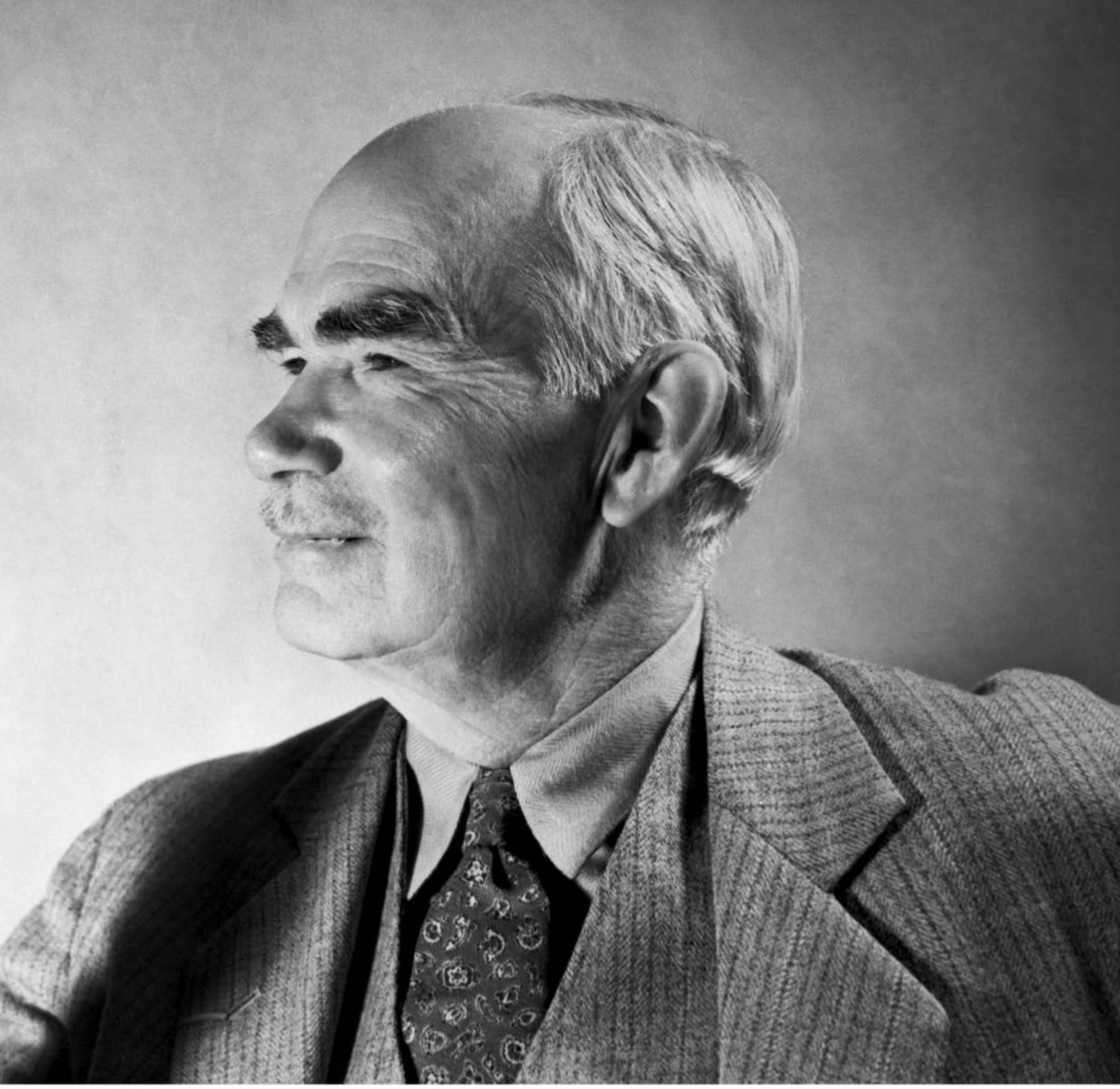
Charles Darwin was a naturally curious guy who first pursued a career as a doctor but soon gave that line of work a hard pass, and I can't say I blame him; opium cough syrups and cocaine toothache medication was considered cutting edge at the time. Instead, Chuck D ended up hitching a ride on a ten-gun Royal Navy ship for a five-year voyage to South America and back again – that's how unpalatable a Victorian-era medical career was, folks.



Now, I don't know if Darwin could read tabs, had a favourite Nirvana song, or cared for those new Acoustasonic Jazzmasters that are all over the internet, but for his sake I hope so. Just imagine a five-year voyage without a guitar to play *Stairway* and *Free Bird* on! In any case, Darwin's revolutionary ideas about how the world became the way it is also gives us a way to understand music, and especially our guitars, as they exist today.

Darwin was of course one of the first scientists to suggest that there was a system present within nature that explained the way things evolve. It explained the tiny, consistent biological changes that caused organisms to live longer, better, healthier lives. It's a system that you probably know better from science class as natural selection.

I know most of you have visions of lizards and monkeys in your mind right now – or maybe even that intense scene with the dinosaurs from *Fantasia*



Lee de Forest's vacuum tube would change everything – thankfully for gigging guitar players everywhere, they weren't all as big as that one

© O. L. Shider form Triangle / Getty Images

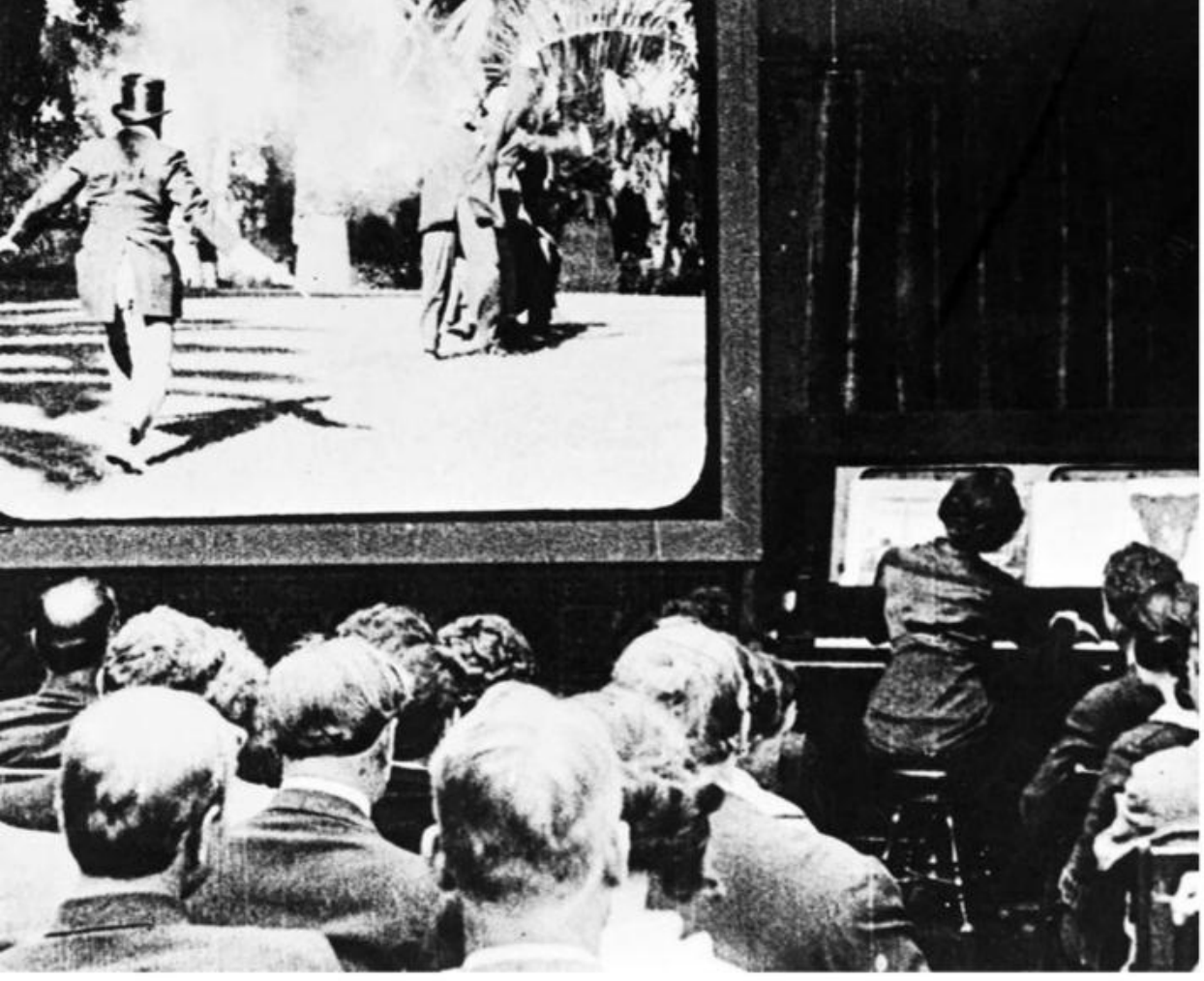
– but this system doesn't just exist as an explanation of the natural world, it can also help us see how small changes lead to big changes in industry, music, inventions, science, entertainment and pretty much any sphere of life. It gives us a framework today to understand that nothing appears from nothing, and everything comes from something.

PLANES, TRAINS AND MAINLY AUTOMOBILES

To help you see the bigger picture, let's talk about transportation. The settlers of the Oregon Trail in the 1840s used covered wagons to cross the country in search of a new home, but just 70 years later, men like Henry Ford replaced the mules and oxen-driven wagons with a gasoline-powered engine. The effects of this evolutionary movement forward are astounding. Now if you look almost one hundred years later to the day, Elon Musk released the Tesla Roadster, the first successful fully electric car. Yup. That's what the natural selection of transportation looks like. At this rate, who knows, our children may finally see those flying cars we were promised in all those 80s and 90s movies.

But the important thing is how we got there. Henry Ford didn't just wake up one day and invent the mass-produced automobile from the ground up – thousands of small, seemingly unimportant discoveries and inventions add up over years and decades until finally, we reach a technological tipping point, and these tipping points change history from the inside out. And that's true of all massive inventions that change our world – they don't just happen, they evolve.

Now, in my previous columns, we talked about how the electric guitar was invented and how the first effects ever were made. I promised we'd end up in the 1960s, the greatest decade of music ever,



The Vitaphone system changed the movie industry forever, but it was bad news for that nice lady playing piano down at the front of the theatre...

and we will. But we need to take a quick detour first. Today I want to show you how the electric guitar amplifier actually came before the electric guitar and its effects. It's a classic case of the chicken and the egg, and it's essential to understanding the electric guitar's evolution and origins. Remember earlier where you said, "Josh should only talk about effects"? Well, I am. I'm talking about the *effects* of technological evolution. See what I did there?

MAKE IT LOUDER

As early as 1876, inventors were developing a way to amplify phone calls across longer distances. After solving that problem, electrical engineers shifted their focus to radio waves, hoping to amplify the signal from a single radio station enough to be received on a radio located hundreds of miles away. Just as turning up the volume on our guitar amplifier delivers more power to our speakers, allowing more people to hear us, radio engineers were effectively doing the same thing. By turning up the power of a radio's transmitter, more people could hear what was being broadcast. Telephone and radio are the origin of amplification, and guitarists owe everything we know to the engineers who laid the foundation of electrical design. Essentially, you don't get Eddie Van Halen rocking out on his guitar unless you have a parade of pocket protector-wearing nerds beforehand creating the technology for him to do it.

One such nerd was a guy named Lee de Forest, a 33-year-old Iowan who invented the triode vacuum tube in 1907. This was the first invention that allowed us to amplify sound in a dependable way; it took off immediately and forever changed the boundaries of what we could do with audio. Engineers in every field imaginable saw immediate use for this technological advance. Radio, movies, live entertainment, and especially musicians had much to gain from Lee's discovery. The triode vacuum tube finally let us be louder than real life.

Coincidentally, Lee is a perfect example of an unknown legend in guitar. Just imagine all the guitar forums without arguments over why tubes sound so much better than solid-state. Thanks, Lee, for all the quality late night reading.

NOT SO SILENT MOVIES

But progress isn't always good news for everyone. By 1925, movie theatres had found their way into every major city in America, and these theatres had an accompanist on the payroll. In the era of silent movies, soundtracks were provided by live musicians, usually a guy or gal thumping away at the piano to a score provided by the filmmakers – or, in the really ritzy theatres, played by a full orchestra. The so-called silent movies weren't actually silent at all. The sound was just produced live instead of being recorded beforehand and played back as we know it today.

The first 'talkie' (a movie with pre-recorded, synchronised dialogue) was released in 1927: *The Jazz Singer*. It only had three minutes of talking, because the Vitaphone system of the day wasn't able to synchronise audio to the picture for the duration of an entire feature. After a few minutes, the audio and picture sync would drift apart like the movie was badly dubbed.

Fortunately, filmmakers were able to improve the system fairly quickly, and soon they could synchronise sound for an entire movie. Now that pre-recorded audio and video could finally function side by side, the movie industry exploded. As movie theatres got bigger, sound needed to be amplified even further, which pushed the development of sound systems.

Not everyone was thrilled about this great development in technology, namely the hundreds of thousands of musicians who ended up out of work. These same musicians who had played in every theatre in America in 1925 found themselves by 1930 in an entirely new musical and technological era: the era of electronic recording. Understandably, the American Federation of Musicians was upset. Their members were out of work and weren't paying dues. They launched an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to convince the general public that live music was better than this lifeless pre-recorded monstrosity. This campaign included an incredibly creepy page-sized advertisement in Liberty magazine which depicted America as an infant child, and the new synchronised music as a robotic nanny.

As unfortunate as it was to see musicians lose their gigs to electronic innovation, a few decades of gradual evolution as we moved into the electronic age would soon give live music the rebirth it desperately needed. The man responsible for birthing this evolutionary tipping point was a radio repairman by the name of Leo Fender, and the means of this great leap forward is my favourite ever guitar amp, the 1959 Fender Bassman. Now the Bassman wasn't the first guitar amp, and the '59 model wasn't even the *first Bassman*, but it might be the most important in the history of popular music. Join me again next month, and we'll start digging into just why that is…

Join Josh Scott for more effects adventures at thejhsshow.com

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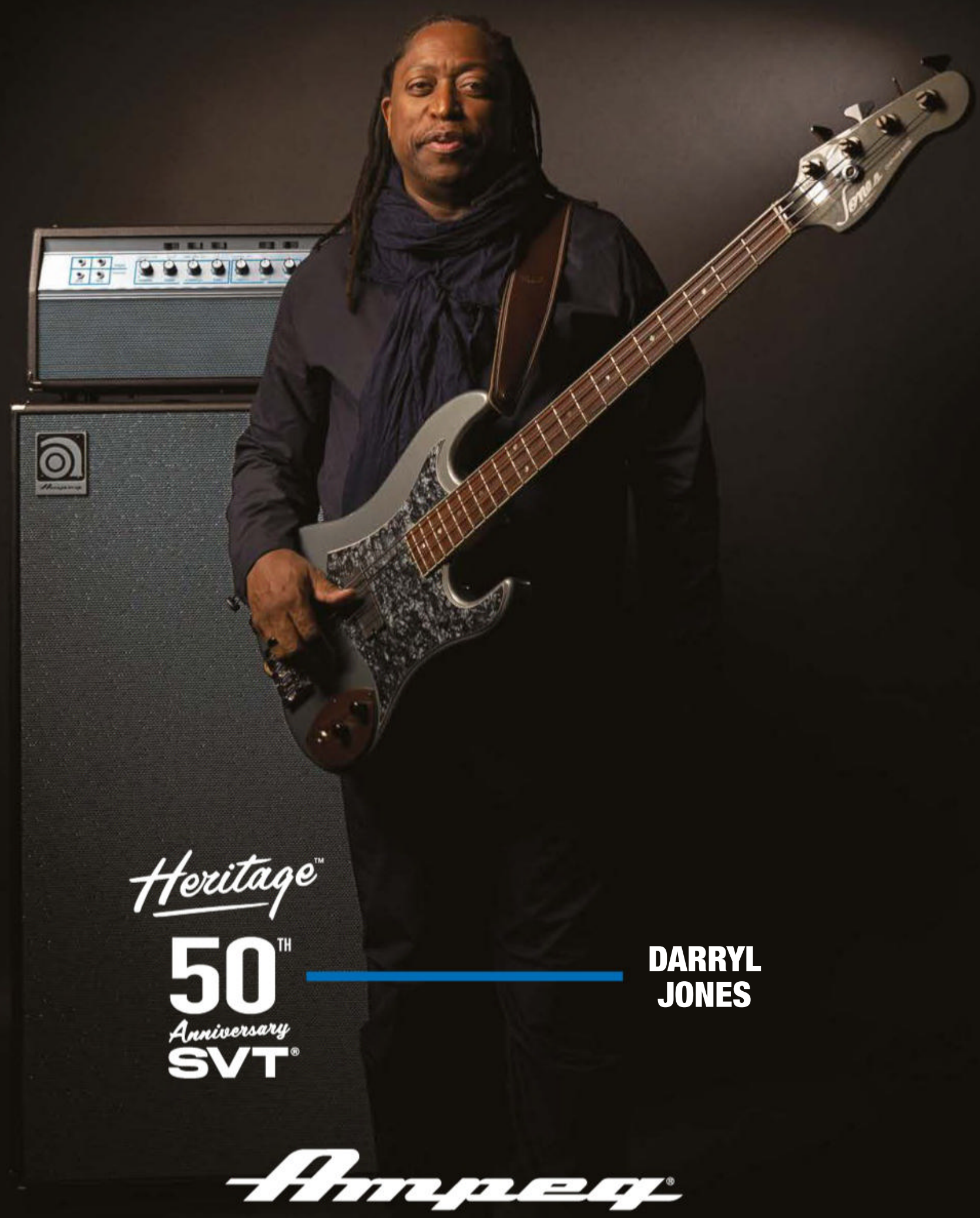

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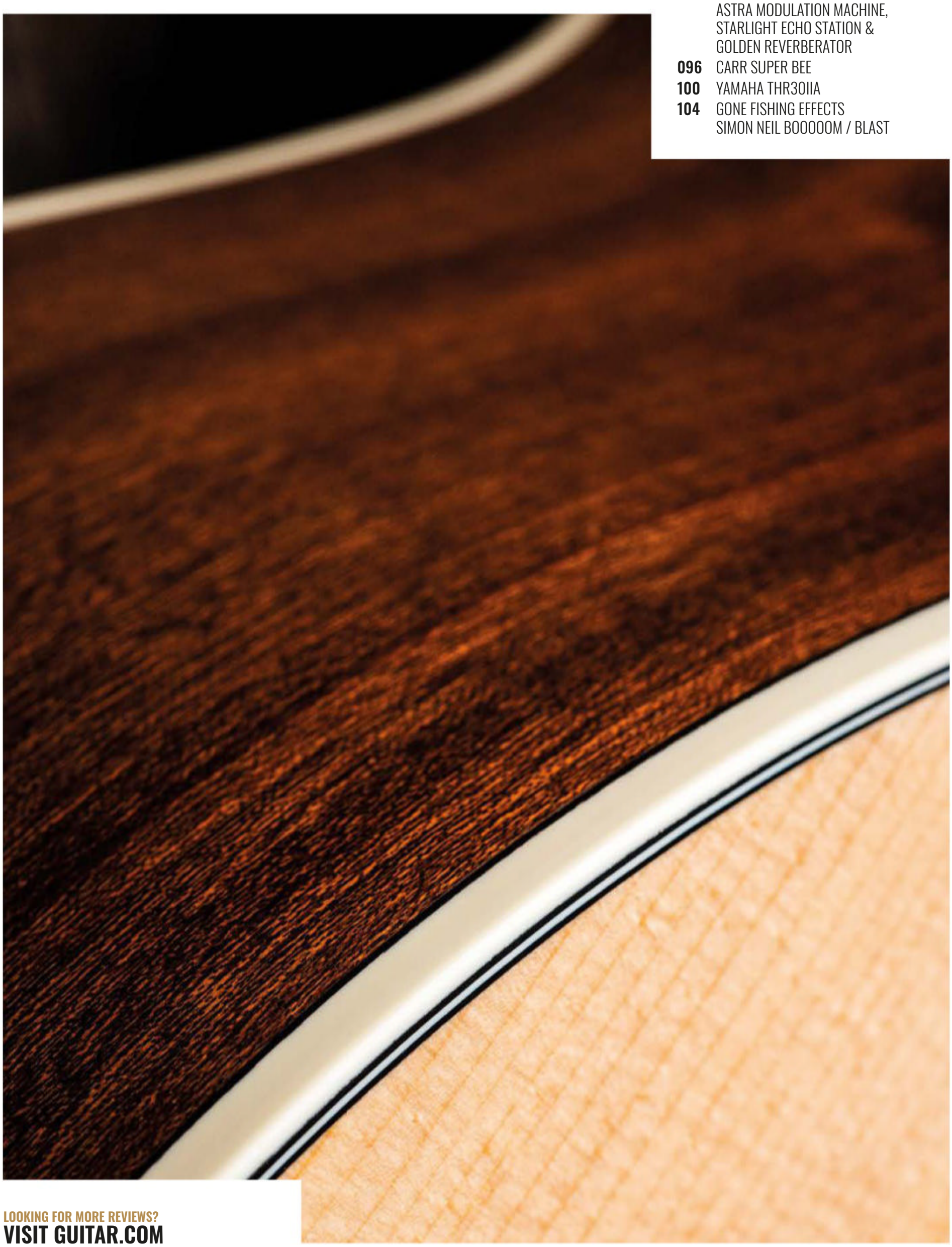

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On brand: the Romeo LA's elegant headstock features a pearl logo

EASTMAN ROMEO LA

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

As Eastman's svelte hollowbody gets a West Coast makeover, are we left California Dreamin' or Pacific Ocean Blue?

A classy original design courtesy of master luthier Otto D'Ambrosio, the Eastman Romeo arrived on the map in 2019 seeking to answer the question, "What would the Telecaster of the archtop world look and sound like?" The following year, the Romeo SC went further down that road by swapping the neck humbucker for a hum-cancelling Telecaster neck pickup, the Seymour Duncan Vintage Stack. Now Romeo's third incarnation has been unveiled and it steers the model into hot-rod territory with the addition of a custom-colour metallic finish and the switch to fully laminated body construction, a vibrato tailpiece and raw nickel Radiator pickup covers with gold foil peeking through the slots.

"We were thinking about what we could do to create an addition to the Romeo line that would appeal to a different player and have a different sound," says Eastman's international sales and product manager Pepijn 't Hart as we chat about the model. "And the first thing we did was look for a new colour. Otto once did an incredible USA-made custom edition of a T486 in Celestine Blue, a colour that he created specifically for the one-off guitar. It has always been one of my favourite colours. This was the challenge, to have our Beijing workshop colour specialist Hua Rong recreate this colour for Romeo LA. As always, she succeeded with honours!"

With the paintjob finalised, next came the wood choices and hardware. "We changed the wood to a fully laminated version – laminated spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides – to come closer to the classic thinline sound," says Pepijn. "One of my wishes was also to add a vibrato system to Romeo as the design just begs for a trem. However, that turned out to be much more difficult than we initially thought. We wanted to add a Bigsby B3. However, the top was too carved to make that work. But I didn't want to give up on this idea, therefore I reached out to my friend Dieter Gölsdorf [founder and owner of Duesenberg Guitars and Göldo parts] and asked him if he had a solution. Being brilliant as he is, he did: the Göldo Les Trem. In design and functionality, it's like it was made for Romeo LA."

This elegant Göldo unit was designed to allow players to swap a stopbar tailpiece for a vibrato system without drilling or routing. But it also acts as a space-saving option for when a Bigsby isn't practical, and has a buttery, expressive feel somewhere between that of a Jazzmaster vibrato and a Paul Bigsby design. For the Romeo LA, Eastman chose to combine this with Göldo's 3-Point Vario bridge – essentially an evolved tune-o-matic that minimises tilting and rattling – and back-locking tuners. The result offers stable tuning unless you take things to extremes and, thanks in no small part to the ingenuity of the tailpiece design, there's an even and hardtail-like acoustic sustain with lively harmonic content. It's impressive when you consider that, aside from a mahogany block beneath the bridge that couples the top and back, the Romeo is fully hollow.

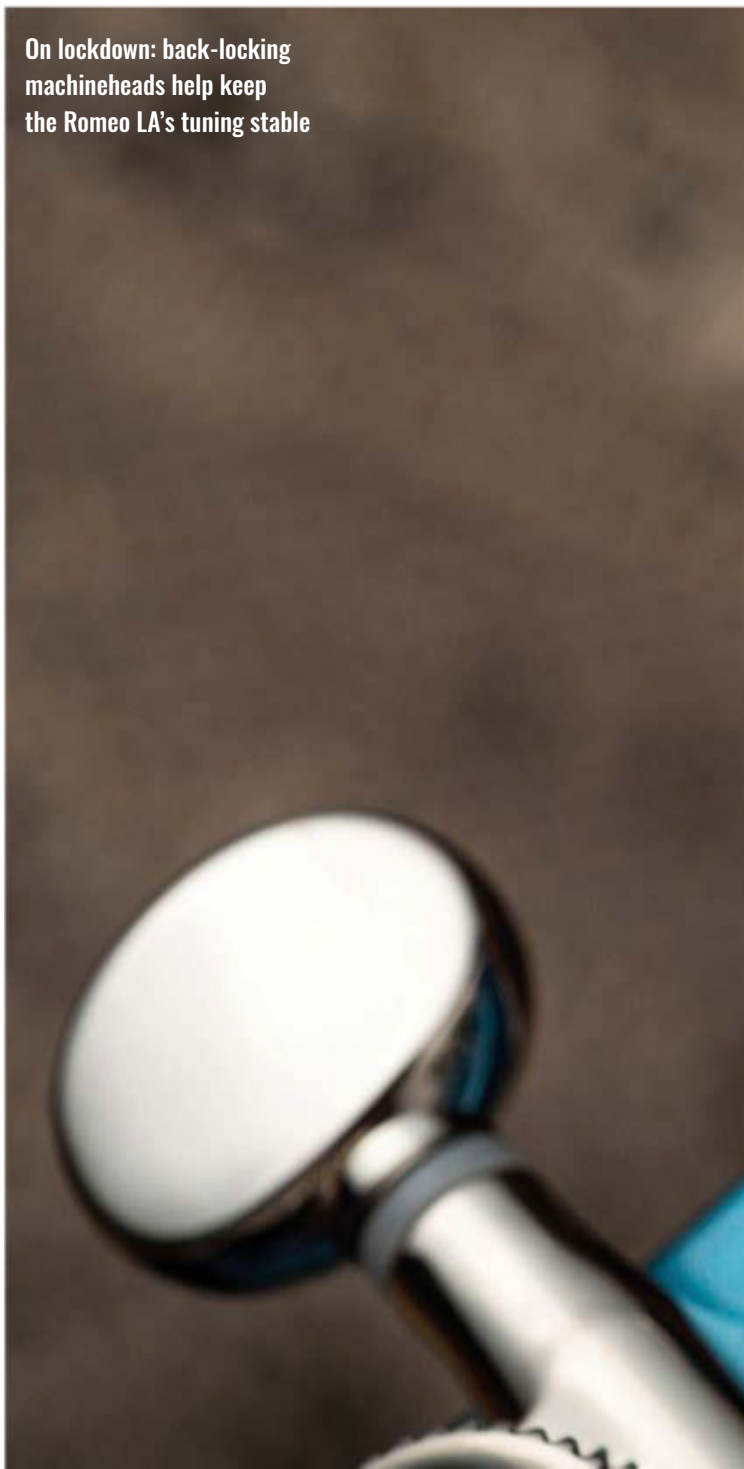
When it came to electronics, the Eastman team recognised that the guitar needed an amplified tone in keeping with its aesthetic. "The guitar needed to sound as it looks," says Pepijn. "So a kind of surfy, airy sound, but with enough grit to be versatile.

Little details: ivoroid binding frames the Celestine Blue finish

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,499 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Thinline single-cutaway hollowbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Spruce laminate top, mahogany laminate back and sides, set maple neck with 12" radius ebony fingerboard, pearl dot inlays, single-acting truss rod, 22x Jescar 47104 frets, bone nut
HARDWARE Göldo 3-Point Vario tune-o-matic bridge, Les Trem vibrato tailpiece and locking tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Seymour Duncan Radiator Phat Cat P-90 pickups, 2x volume, 1x tone (bridge pickup only), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 44.6mm at nut, 54.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.0mm at first fret 23.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37.3mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.8kg/6.2lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Celestine Blue gloss nitrocellulose
CONTACT eastmanguitars.com

Strike gold: Eastman reworked the wiring for Romeo's LA incarnation



On lockdown: back-locking machineheads help keep the Romeo LA's tuning stable

In came Seymour Duncan, with whom we created a pickup especially for Romeo LA. It's got the SD Radiator covers with the gold foil inserts but under the hood it has Phat Cat P-90s. This proved to be the golden ticket for this guitar. Regular gold foil pickups often don't take pedals that well, so I didn't want to go for that. But we did want that look."

The final piece of the puzzle was the wiring. "The last change was to create a different volume and tone palette from the original Romeo, which has a single volume and two tone controls," explains Pepijn. "Romeo LA has two volume controls and only one tone, which only works on the bridge pickup. On a guitar like this, who wants to roll off the tone on the neck pickup, which is already darker sounding? So now the player can play with the two volume controls and roll off a little of the tone on the bridge if needed. We felt this was a real player's feature. And ultimately, Otto's design started out as a guitar to really serve the player's comfort and usability."

Eastman's hand-built ethos doesn't produce instruments made with laser-like precision but the execution here is pretty clean aside from some slight scruffiness around the f-holes. Our only real gripe is that the tiny screw meant to secure the ebony truss-rod cover to the headstock comes loose very easily indeed – a larger or second screw would cure this issue.

IN USE

The neck's fairly slim C profile and spacious ebony 'board feels fast and approachable,

Feline groovy: Duncan Phat Cat P-90s reside beneath Radiator covers

and is unlikely to alienate many players, likewise the guitar's compact feel. Thanks to the additional hardware down at the tail, strapped-on balance here is even better than with Romeo's other iterations. The pickup selector switch does feel rather a long way away when you play this guitar in the standing position, and you have to work around the vibrato arm to find the other controls. As a result, we wonder if a Gretsch-style master volume on the treble horn or a pickup selector on the bass side might be easier to reach. But that said, it's obvious why the Eastman team would've been reluctant to disrupt the Romeo LA's clean lines. Guitar shop employees please note: encourage any prospective buyers to demo this thing near a mirror and you are certain to make the sale.

Problem solver: Dieter Gölsdorf's Les Trem is a space-saving design

There is so much going on with this guitar acoustically that it takes us a while to plug in. But when we do, it's instantly apparent that the Seymour Duncan pickups were an inspired choice. Phat Cats have been around for a while but we've never heard them sound as well suited to an instrument as they do here. That classic P-90 punch, muscle and clarity marries well with the Romeo LA's physical characteristics to bring a chime and jangle to the high end that just *loves* an AC30.

Gretsch and even Rickenbacker-like characteristics mean 1960s-influenced pop is very well served and those Beatles, Petty and power-pop moments sound seriously authentic. Up the gain and spring reverb and you'll find everything from the raucous grit of Jack White and Polly Harvey to more moody, filmic textures – and if you crank the volume and ride the edge of feedback there's an awful lot of fun to be had here.

Switching to a smoother, cleaner 6V6 tone, we find ourselves spending a lot of time on the neck pickup – it's a really sweet voice with just enough percussive bite for authentic 1970s funk and soul. We don't miss having a neck pickup tone control at all but if you want darker flavours then rolling back the tone in the middle setting works as advertised.

Though the original Romeo model would still be our recommended destination for traditionalists, the Romeo LA is the most overtly 'alternative' Eastman model so far and it's also our favourite. The Romeo design has proven a versatile platform – we can't wait to see where Eastman takes it next.

9/10 **Jangle and raunch aplenty from an inspiring original design**

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Tip of the hat: the Ivison Dakota's headstock features a subtle nod to the reverse Firebird's stepped design

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WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Looking for Firebird stylings in a less intimidating form factor? This artful new single-cut design from Neil Ivison could be the easier ride you desire

From Gene Baker's B3 Phoenix to Joe Bonamassa's Bonabyrd Les Paul, electric guitars that combine Firebird stylings with more traditional body outlines are nothing new. The Ivison Dakota, however, might just be the most engaging and downright cool variation on the theme we've encountered to date.

"It stemmed from me loving the Firebird sound but not getting on with the ergonomics", Neil Ivison explains. "It takes a certain person to pull off a Firebird and, while I would love to think I'm that sort of person, in reality I'm not. 'It can't just be me,' I thought, 'so how can I make this work?'

"My Hurricane body shape had been well received so I thought I'd adapt that and try a set of mini-humbuckers. Pretty soon I realised that I had a platform for all the Firebird variations but in a more familiar single-cut format."

Rather than being equipped with a Reverse Firebird-style through-neck, the Dakota is built around a mahogany centre-block with glued-on wings made from the offcuts from Ivison's Hurricane body blanks. Fortunately, Neil had been hoarding them because he couldn't bring himself to throw away good wood. The wings have less depth than the centre block and, by ensuring that the surfaces are flush at the back, Ivison achieves a raised central section. The one-piece mahogany neck is glued into the centre block using a traditional long tenon joint.

The bridges with which Firebirds were traditionally equipped depended on their position in the Gibson hierarchy. The Firebird I and III had wraptails rather than the tune-o-matic bridges of the V and VII models. Though they were at the time seen as technically inferior, many players now consider wrapover bridges to be the sonically superior option. For the Dakota, Ivison has opted for an aluminium Faber wrapover bridge with intonation compensation.

Firebird I and II models sported celluloid dots rather than trapezoid blocks, and here the rosewood fretboard has dots and white binding. Ivison has wisely retained his own headstock shape but a raised black centre section contrasts with thinner mahogany wings in another subtle nod to the Dakota's inspiration.

One vintage Firebird feature that Ivison has veered away from is the Gibson's rather cluttered control layout and front-mounted jack socket. Instead, Neil has mounted the socket on the side of the body but retained some of the flavour of the original via an asymmetrical control arrangement: two volume controls just below the centre-section line and a master tone nearer the body edge.

The scaled-down pickguard, for which Ivison has sourced appropriate off-white three-ply plastic, is an inspired touch. If you look closely, you'll notice a little kink at the start of the waist where the angle changes, allowing the scratchplate to end up at the back edge of the bridge pickup ring – just like a Gibson Firebird.

Ivison guitars sport Sunbear pickups as standard and this guitar's SunBird set feature Sunbear founder Stuart Robson's sensational relic'ing treatment. Neil Ivison's nitro finish looks just as good thanks to a low-plasticiser lacquer, naturally induced checking and well-judged dings and de-glossing.

KEY FEATURES

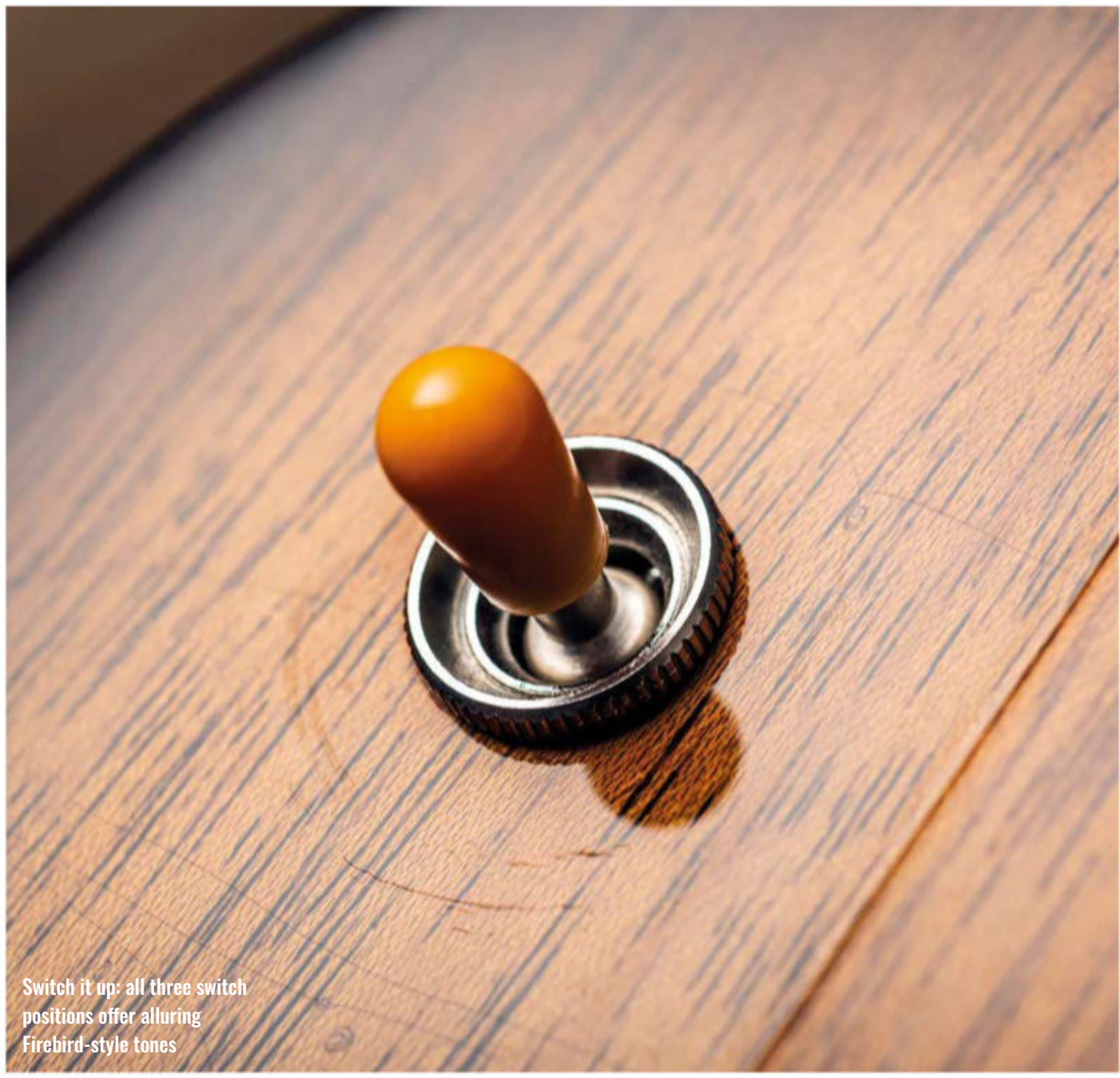
PRICE £3,495 (inc Hiscox LiteFlite case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the UK
BUILD 3-piece African mahogany body, Honduran mahogany set neck, rosewood fretboard with 12” radius, 22 Jescar 45100 frets, bone nut, celluloid marker dots
HARDWARE Faber compensated wrapover bridge, Faber vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS Sunbear SunBird Firebird-style mini-humbuckers, 2x individual volume controls, master tone control, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.6”/625mm
NECK WIDTH 43.5mm at nut, 53.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.6mm at first fret, 24.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37.6mm at nut, 51.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.34kg/7.36lb
LEFT HANDERS Yes
FINISH Aged Tobacco Sunburst nitrocellulose (see website for other options)
CONTACT ivisonguitars.com, atbguitars.com

Place in the sun: the SunBird covers come factory aged

IN USE

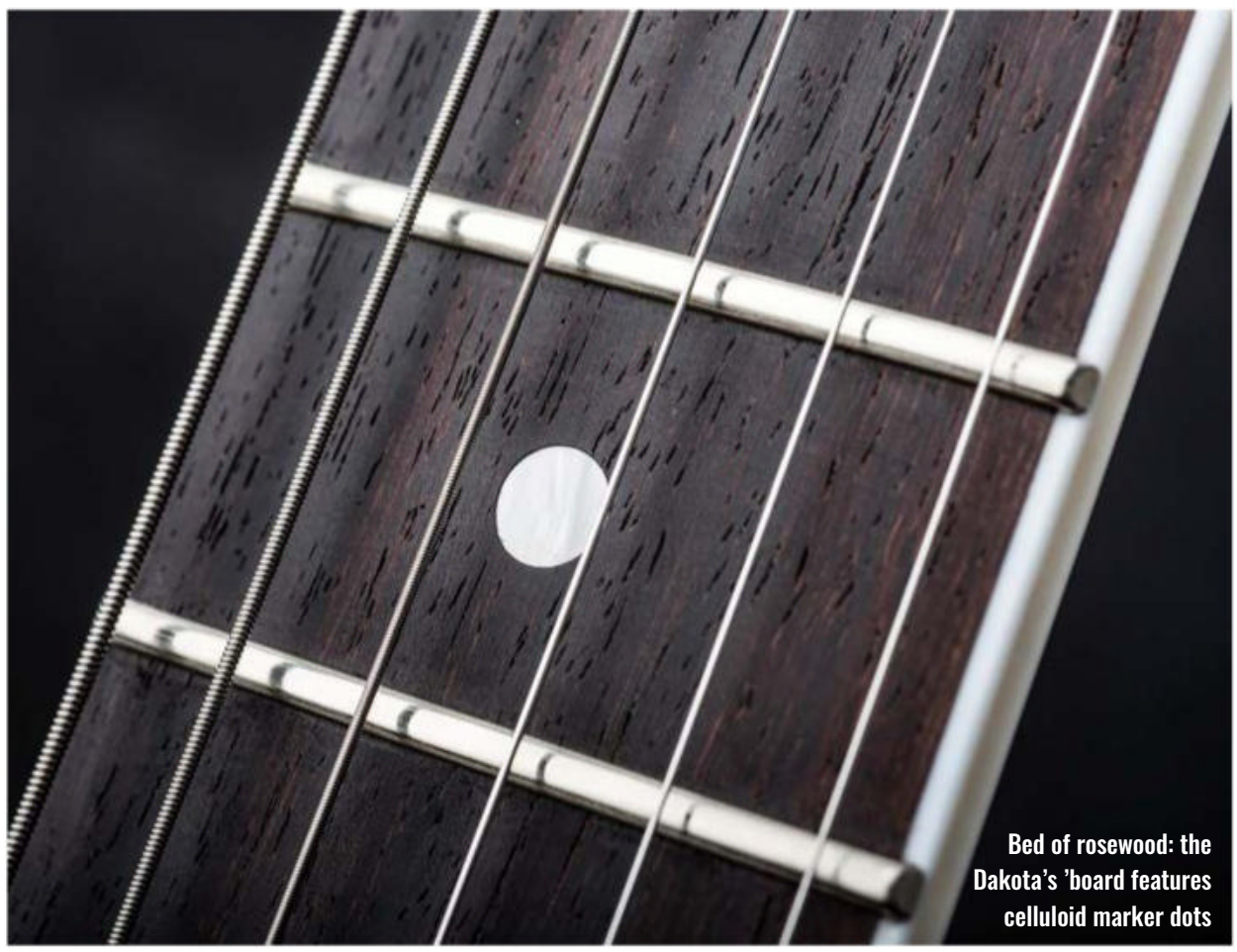
Neil is one of those rare guitar builders who can carve a convincing 1950s Gibson-style neck profile. Here, however, we have something a little different. “I slimmed it down a bit because the Firebird is a 1960s guitar and I don’t want to keep repeating myself”, he tells us. As a result, the Dakota has a full roundness, with no hint of a V, but the shoulders are soft and it’s more like a 1950s-1960s hybrid than the wide, slim profile you’d likely find on a Firebird from 1963-65.

With its deep-set neck and regular tuners, the Dakota is both lightweight and balanced. It feels more like a 1950s Les Paul Special than either a Firebird or Les Paul Standard, and thankfully there’s absolutely no neck heaviness.



Switch it up: all three switch positions offer alluring Firebird-style tones

Safe bet: the Faber wraptail bridge offers intonation compensation



Bed of rosewood: the Dakota's 'board features celluloid marker dots

A lightweight mahogany body coupled with a set neck and a wraptail bridge is about as close to a safe bet as you can get in guitar-making but the Dakota meets expectations and then some. Unplugged it's loud, balanced, dynamically responsive and has a woody, mellow brightness.

All these characteristics come through in the Dakota's unfamiliar but fascinating SunBird pickups. But what's the difference between Firebird pickups and regular mini-humbuckers? Let Stuart Robson explain.

"A classic humbucker, mini-humbucker or P-90 employs horizontally loaded bar magnets to 'charge' screws or slugs that sit vertically under the strings," he says. "The Firebird pickup instead uses a bar magnet within each of its two coils and orientates them vertically across the full width of the pickup. On top of that oddity, there's also a ferrous plate directly under those magnets in a manner that bears some resemblance to a Tele bridge pickup."

Going head-to-head with a 1955 Special, the SunBirds have a lower output and are leaner through the mids. But they display greater clarity and breadth of tone, and there's more going on harmonically. In that sense, they're closer to the vintage PAFs in our Les Paul Standard, and have a similarly expressive dynamic response and greater midrange transparency. P-90s generally hand you rock 'n' roll tone on a plate, which is more than sufficient for many players. The SunBirds, meanwhile, make you work a little harder for sustain and overdrive but their complexity continually surprises and inspires.

Firebird pickups are often described as having Strat-like qualities, largely due to their clarity and brightness. This is fair comment in the neck position but less so at the bridge, which has a wiry snarl with a hint of nasality. As a set, we'd place these pickups somewhere between low-output PAFs and DeArmond Dynasonics.

With overdrive, the Dakota absolutely nails classic Southern rock and Johnny Winter tones. But played clean, you get a hi-fi clarity with articulate attack, ample low end and the sweetest treble. There's also a pleasing contrast between the bridge and neck settings, with the neck position having an almost semi-acoustic quality.

The Ivison Dakota somehow manages to capture the Firebird spirit without directly copying any Firebird features. It also sounds like a Firebird but plays and feels more like a Les Paul Special, so that you can scratch that Firebird itch without having to put up with the quirks of the original's design.

We have only two minor complaints: the fretboard binding appears a little too thick, and we would prefer to swap the position of the bridge volume and tone controls, because single-cut autopilot keeps compelling us to reach for the wrong one.

As it turns out, Neil actually agrees on both counts, and assures us that customers can specify the control layout – just as they can the neck profile, pickup complement and bridge/vibrato options.

9/10 **Visually and sonically, this is the most graceful reimagining of Ray Dietrich's original concept we've played so far**

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Take stock: Mule's logo sits proudly on the minimalist peghead

MULE RESOPHONIC GUITARS
MAVIS

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

A little piece of magic handmade in Michigan that combines elements of resonator, solidbody and archtop design

Our first encounter with a Mule Resophonic instrument came back in 2016 and, in the years since, the brand has gone from strength to strength. Helmed by former Huss & Dalton luthier Matt Eich and based in Saginaw, Michigan, the company's waiting list continues to grow along with the roll call of high-profile players who appreciate the raw charm of Eich's creations. This includes, to name but a handful, such varied players as Jeffrey Foucault, Jason Momoa, Celisse Henderson, Joey Landreth, Rebecca Lovell, Ariel Posen and Kristian Matsson (aka The Tallest Man On Earth).

In addition to the conventional resonators that started it all, the Mule catalogue also contains single and double-cutaway variations on the Mulecaster. These guitars feature Strat and Tele-inspired outlines with hollow steel bodies and a 25-inch scale length that can be strung in standard or baritone tuning, and they come in a variety of powdercoat hues as well as Mule's trademark distressed steel.

Early 2020 saw the birth of a new Mule model somewhere between the two poles of Matt's existing electric and resonator designs. Christened Mavis, Eich describes it thusly: "It's part archtop guitar, part electric guitar, part resonator. And something completely different to your ear. It's awesome and it's weird, it will push you. You'll find something new."

Available with or without cutaway, the Mavis uses roasted woods and combines solidbody construction with a resonator cone and a single humbucking pickup with master volume and tone controls. The neck joins the body at the 13th fret and early versions of Mavis saw Matt utilise a Fender-style bolt-on arrangement with four screws and a plate at the rear, but now he attaches the neck screws from the front and covers them with pearl fingerboard dots. This delivers the clean look of a set neck but means the neck can be removed much more easily should repairs be required down the line. Somewhere, many years in the future, a weary luthier is thankful that they don't have to drill holes and inject steam.

The neck itself utilises a scarf joint and stacked heel, which was a conscious decision on Matt's part designed to minimise wastage. "Two-piece necks are cool but you almost waste as much wood in the blank as you use," he says. "Even in the beginning when I was working by myself, I would end up with all these big boxes of cutoffs that I was trying to keep, just in case I could use them for something. I ended up having to throw them away. It felt gross."

Though it started life as a semi-hollow instrument before morphing into a solidbody design, the large amount of wood removed to allow installation of Mavis' resonator cone means that the production version's overall weight and balance is still akin to that of a thinline semi. With a body depth of approximately 38mm at the edges, the back is carved from roasted pine based on geometry drawn up by Matt's violin-maker friend Christopher Jacoby – a feature that Eich regards as a game-changer for the model. The roasted maple top, meanwhile, has an attractive figure and is outlined by marquetry purfling and complemented beautifully by one of the best-looking pickguards we've seen in years, fashioned from 4mm thick Italian celluloid.

The neck profile is a cultured, soft-shouldered deep V/C that suits the guitar's aesthetic as well as it sits in the hand, and the hand-rubbed oil finish feels damn near perfect. Though it arrives strung with a wound G, the combination of 25-inch scale and 20-inch fingerboard radius make bluesy bends easy, while tuning is kept stable by a set of vintage-style three-on-a-plate machineheads whose design was the result of one of Matt's first-ever CAD projects.

IN USE

Before we even plug in, this guitar provides an amazingly fertile breeding ground for ideas. Acoustically, as you'd expect, the Mavis provides a good deal more volume and resonance than the average unplugged electric and this makes it a fabulous couch guitar or accompaniment to a flat-top acoustic during a songwriting session.

Front loader: the neck is screwed on from the front, which makes for clean lines around the back

KEY FEATURES

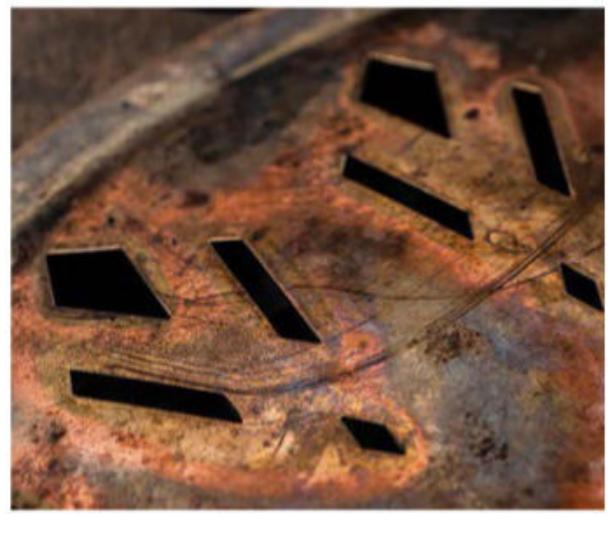
PRICE $3,900 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric resonator, made in the USA
BUILD Carved roasted pine arched back with roasted maple top, bolt-on roasted maple neck, ebony fingerboard with 20” radius, 21 medium frets
HARDWARE Biscuit bridge and Mule three-on-a-plate open-gear tuners
ELECTRONICS 1x Mule Tomthumbucker mini-humbucking pickup, master volume, master tone
SCALE LENGTH 25”/635mm
NECK WIDTH 45.2mm at nut, 52.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.5mm at first fret, 25.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.8mm at nut, 52.2mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.2lb/3.2kg
OPTIONS Italian celluloid (as reviewed) or maple pickguard, various top woods (enquire for details)
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
FINISH Hand-rubbed Osmo oil
CONTACT muleresophonic.com

Down at the cowboy end, there’s banjo-like plunkiness to the attack combined with a lengthy, mellow sustain. Single notes in higher registers are especially beautiful, with an ethereal halo of harmonics and reverberation. As cool as our review guitar looks, when you hear that high-end, it’s obvious why many players have opted for the cutaway version’s easier access.

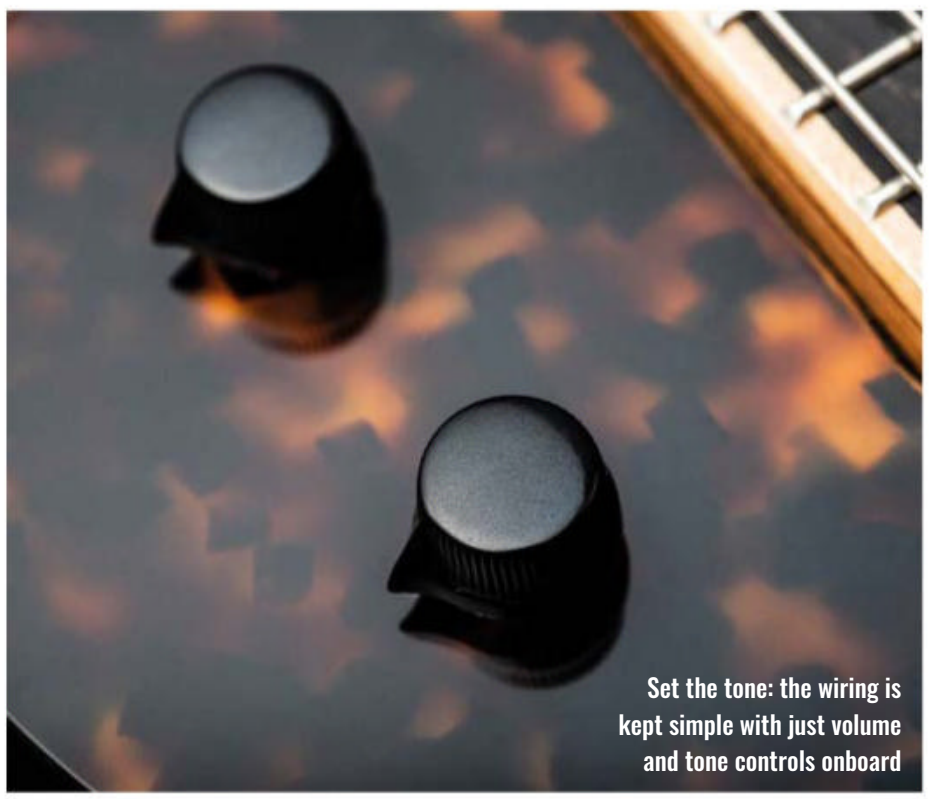
Show the Mavis a microphone and all this translates into something that sounds like you’ve blown the cobwebs off an ancient phonograph and are listening to a century-old blues recording. It’s perfect for lo-fi intros and breakdowns or layering along with amplified takes. Indeed, when using the Mule in the studio, we’d recommend recording acoustic and amplified signals simultaneously to maximise blend options in the mix.

Plugged into an amplifier, it’s like that old record player has been replaced by an IMAX theatre as the sonic landscape erupts into technicolour. Situated relatively far back in the body, Mule’s low-wind Tomthumbucker is capable of both extraordinary depth and beautiful clarity. A helping of that wonderful acoustic character finds its way through the wires, with fingerpicked folk parts sounding glorious and the B-string in particular providing a rich harmonic playground for slide lines.

Cutting edge: the marquetry purfling on the Mavis’ top is an attractive touch



Perfectly formed: Mule's Tomthumbucker provides versatile and expressive tones



Set the tone: the wiring is kept simple with just volume and tone controls onboard

Metal machine: aged metalwork gives the Mavis a suitably old-school vibe

It's not all about Americana and roots music, though; the Mavis is a guitar that would be as at home in the hands of a member of Radiohead as it would Dan Auerbach from The Black Keys, and the aforementioned combination of depth and clarity is a boon for contemporary adventures in ambience with sprawling effects chains. And when we drop the low E string down to D and beyond, there's a wonderfully loose and grungy low-end that loves dirt, while fuzzy powerchords have an enveloping warmth that makes us nostalgic for lo-fi indie rock records of the 1990s.

Over the years the great vocalists in rock and pop history have all had something in common: you believe them. They've all been able to deliver with an authenticity and intensity that moves audiences on some primal level, sometimes in a way that a technically superior performance cannot. That's not to say, of course, that all highly polished performances are inherently lacking in authenticity or that sloppiness can't sometimes be embarrassing. But there are certainly parallels with guitar-making that are relevant here.

For myriad reasons, some instruments simply have X-factor and vibe to spare, and provide a wellspring of inspiration in a way that other extremely well-made, high-spec designs do not. The Mule Mavis falls squarely into the former category, and it feels like both a songwriting companion and the launchpad for hundreds of new ideas. Inspiration is an intensely personal thing, of course, but the sheer number of artists gravitating towards this guitar suggests that on some objective level Matt Eich is doing an awful lot right.

At the moment it's hard to get hold of any Mule models outside of North America and, at the time of writing, the waiting list on Mavis builds stands at 17 months. But if you can track one down, you won't be disappointed. As a wise old guitar journalist once told us, "Buy the guitar that speaks to you." This doesn't just speak, it sings.

9/10 **A new guitar with an old soul that provides almost open-ended potential for creativity**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Ozark Slimline Cutaway Resonator **£712**
National Pioneer RP-2 **£2,195**
James Trussart SteelResoGator Electric **£POA**

CORT
G300 PRO

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Deliciously versatile and impeccably built, could the G300 Pro be a game-changer for Cort?

Cort's prodigious output of original models continues apace, and the G300 Pro – the flagship model from the brand's boutique-styled G series – provides further evidence that the company's mastery of quantity has no detrimental effect on quality. Featuring a basswood body and maple cap, the G300 Pro's shape bears more than a passing resemblance to the Suhr Modern but, priced at £749, it's the market currently occupied by the Ibanez AZ and Charvel Pro-Mod Series that Cort is targeting. On aesthetics alone, it's a worthy contender for your money.

Though its price pales in comparison to the sums commanded by boutique S-type builders, the build quality here doesn't. Indeed, it's tough to describe it as anything less than flawless. With a roasted maple neck and compound-radius 'board, basswood body and 6mm maple cap, stainless-steel frets and Seymour Duncan pickups, the quality of materials and electronics used here is unimpeachable at this price-point.

The roasted maple has a caramel hue so dark that it might be mistaken for rosewood from a distance, and the neck's matt finish is so thin as to be almost non-existent, lending the neck a very natural, almost worn-in feel. There are also glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side-dot markers to prevent you losing your way on dimly lit stages.

The most surprising feature, however, is the neck carve – a delicious handful that's wholly unexpected and seldom found on a 24-fret supposed shred machine. If, like us, you find that thin neck profiles provide no assistance to technical playing styles, the support from the Cort's hefty shoulders will be ideal for quick trips and up and down

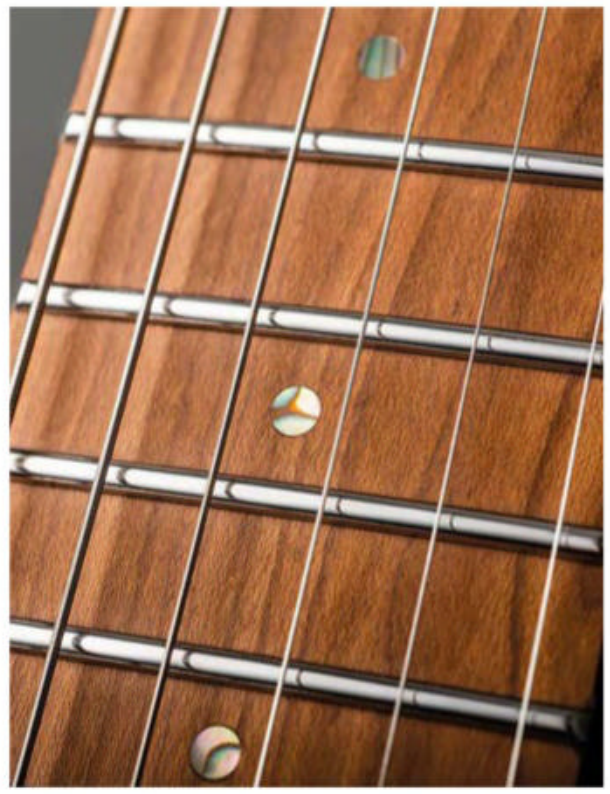
KEY FEATURES

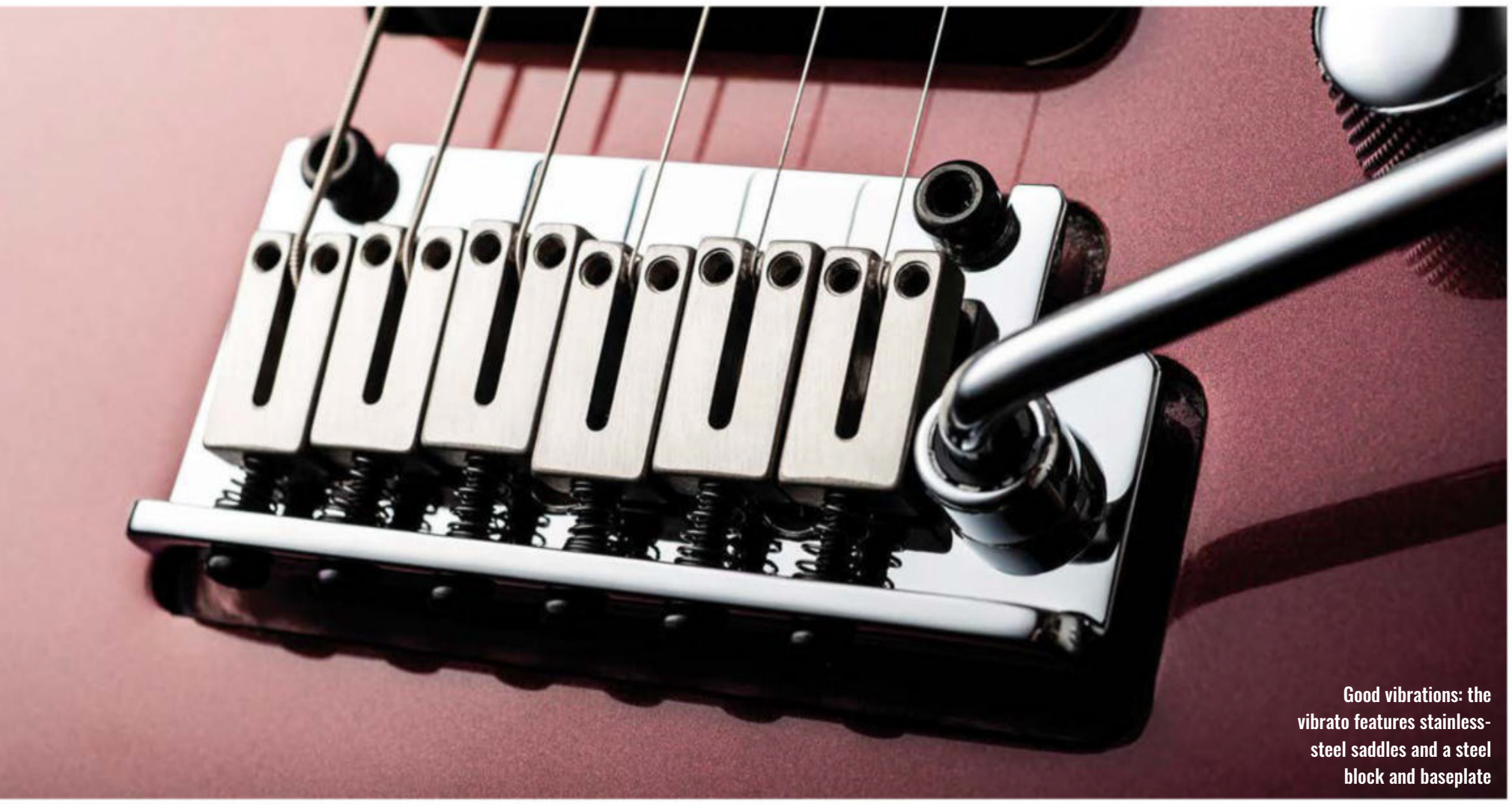
PRICE £749 (no case included)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric, made in Indonesia
BUILD Basswood body with 6mm maple top, bolt-on roasted maple neck with 12-16" compound radius fingerboard, Luminlay side-dot inlays, 24 stainless-steel jumbo frets, Graph Tech Tusq nut
HARDWARE Cort CFA-III 2-point vibrato bridge with six stainless-steel saddles, steel block and baseplate, Cort staggered-post rear-locking tuners
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan SH-2N Jazz (neck) & TB-4 JB (bridge) humbuckers, 5-way blade pickup selector, master volume and tone
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.2mm at nut, 52.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.6mm at 1st fret, 24.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52.9mm at bridge, 35.2mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.5kg/7.72lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Vivid Burgundy metallic (as reviewed), Black
CONTACT cortguitars.com

Easy access: the sculpted neck join makes reaching those upper frets a breeze

Strong and stable: rear-locking staggered tuners ensure stability

Classic combo: Duncan Jazz and JB humbuckers deliver a versatile array of tones





Good vibrations: the vibrato features stainless-steel saddles and a steel block and baseplate

the 'board. Indeed, access to the upper frets is easy thanks to the extended lower-horn cutaway and sculpted neck join.

IN USE

Through our cranked Fender Bassman, the renowned pairing of Duncan SH-2N Jazz and TB-4 JB humbuckers is every bit as punchy and articulate as we'd expect, and in conjunction with the even midrange response of the basswood body and the brilliance from the maple cap, the sounds on offer cover a wide frequency spectrum. However, it's positions two and four (the two inner and outer humbucker coils, respectively) that yield the most intriguing tones. Both positions provide all the slap and spank of single-coils but there's also a healthy dose of low-end to thicken things up, and we have enough power for single-note sustain while remaining brash enough to poke through a dense mix. These positions thrive in clean settings, showcasing a level of savvy on Cort's part as these are sounds favoured by a growing number of modern technical players.

When shopping for souped-up S-types in this price range, established brands such as Charvel and Ibanez will usually call first dibs on your wallet. But thanks to the exceptional build quality and commendable hardware specifications of the G300 Pro, that may be about to change. In addition, this instrument offers a combination that not many other brands can boast: boutique S-type stylings with a chunky neck. It's a carve that works well for all playing styles but could be particularly desirable for those technical players who don't necessarily equate an instrument built for speed with a skinny neck profile.

The bottom line is that the G300 Pro is a formidable instrument by any standard, and one that proves beyond all doubt that Cort should no longer be considered a company that makes great guitars for other brands. Cort makes great guitars, period.

10/10 **Superb build quality, a gorgeously full neck and consummate sonic versatility make the G300 Pro a must-try, regardless of budget**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Ibanez AZ242PBG-CKB **£1,139**
Charvel Pro-Mod DK24 Dinky HSH **£819**
PRS SE CUSTOM 24 **£799**

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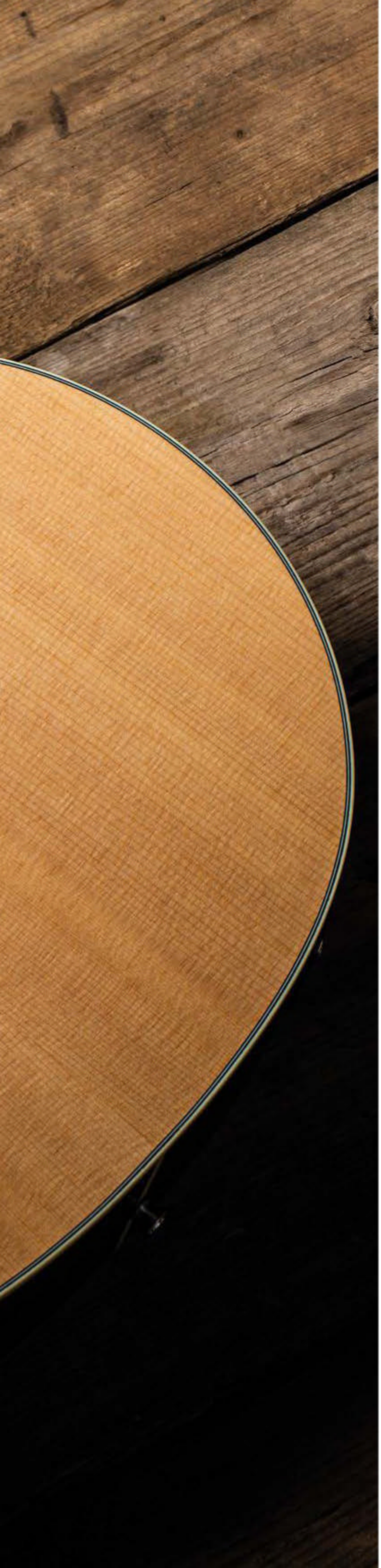


Smooth operators: the F-240E boasts 16:1 nickel-plated tuners

Old-world elegance: the tortoiseshell 'guard looks like old celluloid

GUILD
F-240E JUMBO

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

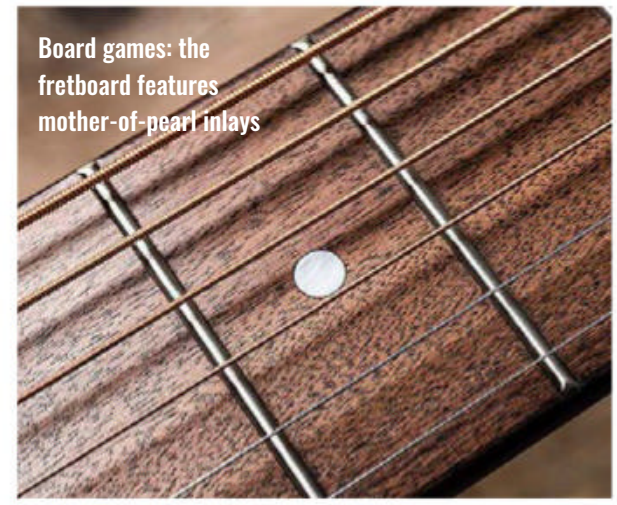
Guild jumbos are iconic instruments, and this affordable version from the Westerly Collection combines classic looks with a solid spruce top and a Fishman pickup system

When it comes to making flat-top acoustics, Guild has an approach of its own. Unlike most of the other big-name US brands, the firm couples solid tops with laminated sides and arched backs also made from laminated wood. These arched backs are so much stronger and stiffer than centre-joined solid-wood plates that there's no need for centre strips or back braces – and exactly that's the recipe we have here.

The F-240E's top is solid Sitka spruce, with wide, fairly straight grain lines and an attractive amber hue. Guild's jumbo outline is accentuated here by ivory-coloured ABS binding, and the inner and outer layers of the back and side laminations are mahogany. The thin tortoiseshell pickguard has the look of old celluloid, and the understated rosette is highlighted by a band of white mother-of-pearl. Matching pearl is used for the bound pau ferro fretboard's dots and the headstock logo. The logo's segmented look is subtly Art Deco and suits Guild's traditional peghead design. The bridge is also pau ferro and boasts a similarly classic shape, and this guitar has plastic pins with a compensated bone saddle.

The mahogany neck features a stacked heel and a scarf-jointed headstock. The side marker dots are a little askew but the fret installation is decent and we particularly

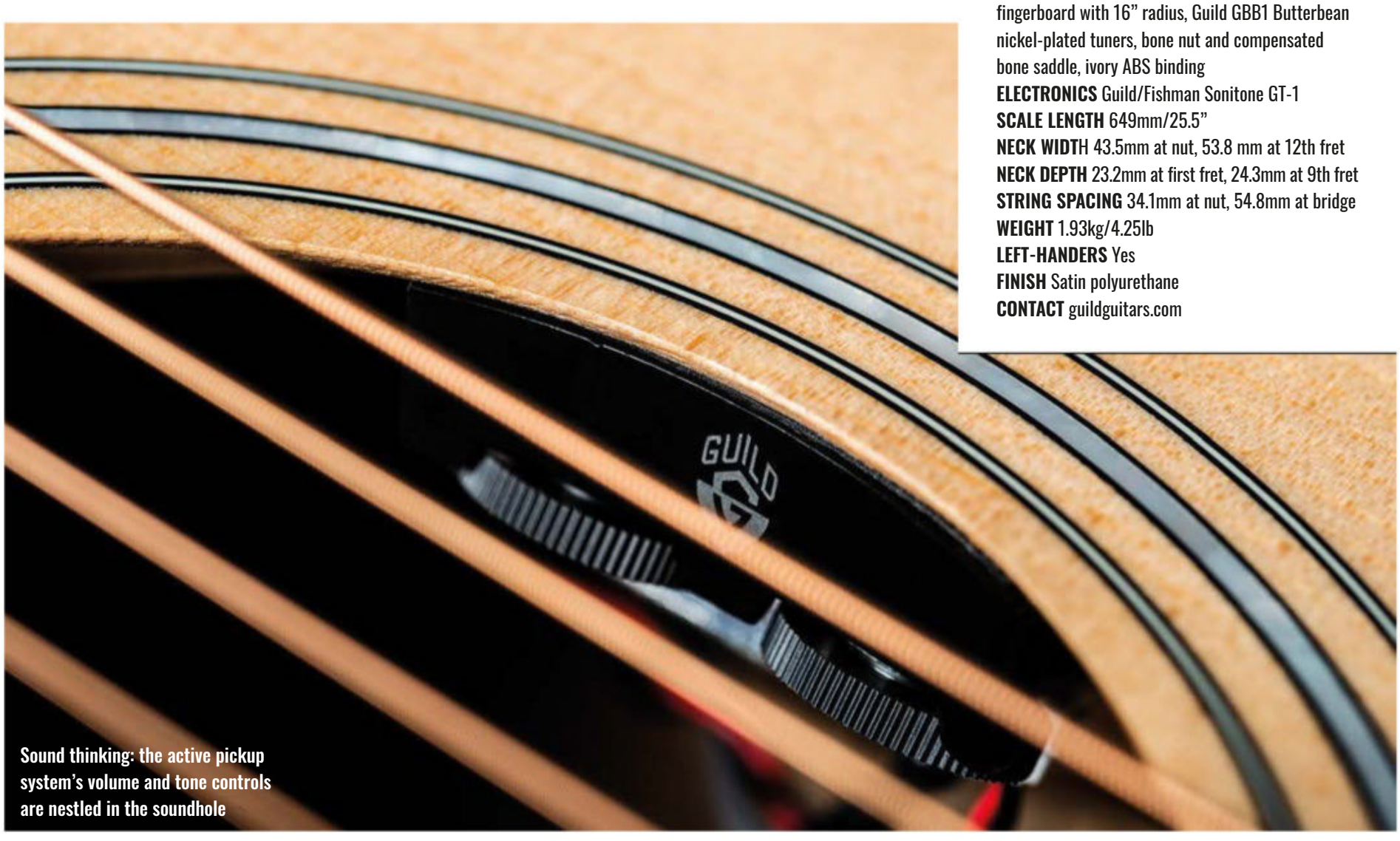
Bone stock: the pau ferro bridge has a compensated bone saddle



Board games: the fretboard features mother-of-pearl inlays

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £389/$555
DESCRIPTION 6-string electro-acoustic guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Solid Sitka spruce top, scalloped X-bracing, laminated mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, pau ferro bridge, plastic bridge pins, bound pau ferro fingerboard with 16" radius, Guild GBB1 Butterbean nickel-plated tuners, bone nut and compensated bone saddle, ivory ABS binding
ELECTRONICS Guild/Fishman Sonitone GT-1
SCALE LENGTH 649mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH 43.5mm at nut, 53.8 mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.2mm at first fret, 24.3mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 34.1mm at nut, 54.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.93kg/4.25lb
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
FINISH Satin polyurethane
CONTACT guildguitars.com



Sound thinking: the active pickup system's volume and tone controls are nestled in the soundhole

like the nickel-plated open-gear tuners, which operate smoothly with a 16:1 ratio.

Included in the package is a Guild/Fishman Sonitone GT-1 active pickup system. The guitar's volume and tone controls nestle just inside the bass edge of the soundhole and an easy-access battery compartment is mounted on the lower bout, along with the jack socket. We can find no fault with the construction and a super-thin satin urethane finish enhances the plain but attractive timbers.

IN USE

As supplied, our Guild F-240E's action is a little on the high side. There's also too much neck relief but the dual-action truss-rod is readily accessible and adding a little tension lowers the action. Ideally, it would come down a little lower, but there's sufficient saddle height to make that an option. The full neck is super-comfy and marries well with the jumbo body without feeing daunting or challenging to play.

The tone is big but without brashness, and it's nicely balanced across the strings. There is ample weight here too but it manifests as more of a focused low-mid thump than a distractingly dominant bass boom. Strumming chords offers boundless fun and you can actually feel the rear of the instrument move as it kicks soundwaves back through the soundhole. You get chiming overtones too, but overall the F-240E is woodier than it is bright.

Switching to fingerstyle, with less energy driving the top, the guitar's character becomes softer and mellower. But when you alternate between picking and strumming, the wide dynamic range impresses. Although fairly basic, the pickup system does a decent job of capturing the acoustic tone and provides some indispensable treble roll-off along with high signal levels. In every way, then, the F-240E is a lot of guitar for the money.

9/10 **One for the strummers rather than the pickers, the F-240E's tone, looks and bang for the buck are impressive**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Sigma SE Series GJME **£279**
Epiphone J200 EC Studio **£399**
Faith FKV Naked Venus **£469**

ERNIE BALL®

SLINKYS FOR DAYS

UNIVERSAL AUDIO

GOLDEN REVERBERATOR, STARLIGHT ECHO STATION & ASTRA MODULATION MACHINE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Universal Audio's first-ever effects pedals are claimed to deliver "sonic authenticity far beyond other stompboxes". Can they really live up to the premium-priced hype?

When an established company moves into the pedal market for the very first time, our interest is naturally piqued. When that company has the pedigree of Universal Audio, our interest isn't so much piqued as blown up to bursting point like a party balloon.

Quite aside from its long history in professional studio recording equipment and software, Universal Audio is the brand behind the Ox Amp Top Box, the award-hogging device that lets you capture the essence of your loudest valve amplifier at neighbour-friendly volume levels. So UA's decision to launch multi-mode modulation, delay and reverb units that promise studio-quality tones in stompbox form? It's quite the big deal.

Of course, there's an awful lot of competition in the premium digital sphere. The approach here, then, has been to keep things relatively simple: the UAFX pedals look a lot like traditional stompers, with minimal controls and no menus or secondary functions to navigate. You can forget MIDI control too – you can't even store more than one preset.

Oh, another thing you can't do is enjoy the reassurance of proven build quality, as these boxes are made in Malaysia. Given all that, you might find your interest-balloon

Strong pedigree: Universal Audio has been dealing in top-tier tech for decades

deflating a little when you notice that they're £355 a pop. But what you're really paying for is UA's meticulously modelled algorithms. Here, it all comes down to the sounds.

In the case of the Astra Modulation Machine, that means chorus and vibrato borrowed from the old Boss CE-1, plus classic flanging and amp-style tremolo. Connect the pedal to a PC or Mac via USB-C and you can also download a few bonus effects: a vintage phaser and a vibey harmonic tremolo.

The Starlight Echo Station mimics an Echoplex tape delay, a Deluxe Memory Man and a clean-edged digital type, with just one downloadable extra: a lo-fi delay emulating the hosepipe-based Cooper Time Cube. Yes, we said hosepipe. Google it.

With the Golden Reverberator, your choice is between springs, plates and a range of rooms and halls from the Lexicon 224, one of the digital reverb units that defined the sound of the 80s. Again, there's one more model available via free download, offering extra plate and chamber sounds from the 224.

Before we get started, we have one potential issue to flag up: UA's pedals may be compact but they each demand 400mA of current, so you'd best check your power supply outputs before clearing a space on your pedalboard – these things are hungry.

IN USE

Despite what we said earlier about UA's simple, stripped-back approach, navigating these pedals doesn't prove entirely intuitive. Firstly, the controls behave differently depending on which model is selected and, in some cases, they aren't used at all – the Astra's shape knob, for example, is only active with the flanger and the harmonic tremolo models.

Secondly, the model switch itself is a bit of an oddity. It's non-latching, meaning that it springs back to the middle position after you've nudged it up or down to move through the list; three red LEDs inform you which model you're on. But because they're optional, the bonus sounds are not labelled. Instead, you just have to watch for an LED to turn green. It all feels a little awkward and compromised.

Anyway, it all comes down to the sounds, right? Well, the Astra's are phenomenal. The full array of five models, each with A and B modes accessed via a toggle switch on the right, adds up to 10 distinct modulation effects – and, truly, you'll struggle to make a less-than-lovely noise with any of them. If you're looking for rich stereo chorus with impeccable clarity and absolutely minimal operating noise, you won't find better. The flanger is equally likeable, creating some nicely metallic textural tinges at lower intensity settings, while the valve-like tremolo throbs away sweetly. In addition, a choppy square-wave variant broadens your options in mode B.

Reach for the stars: the Starlight lets you toy with time divisions for endless fun

Not fussed about the two downloads? Be fussed; they're downright essential. The first offers two flavours of MXR Phase 90 swirliness (script logo and block) while the second is arguably the pick of the whole bunch, letting you flip between a delicious phasey tremolo and something that's more akin to a Uni-Vibe, each with the option of setting the trem speed to respond to pick attack.

Saving presets is very simple, and Universal Audio has wired these pedals so that you can use both footswitches for bypass, as well as for flipping between manual and preset modes. The only exception is the Starlight Echo Station, where you have to hold down the preset switch as it's also used for tap tempo (though we're told you'll soon be able to customise this via an app).

Ah, the Starlight. Is this the perfect Memory Man? Its gently degrading repeats and dreamy modulation are so bang-on it's almost funny, and the 'color' control lets you push the input gain for accurate messiness or keep things cleaner and more hiss-free than an analogue original could ever manage.

The other models are hardly any less compelling. The Echoplex effect is reliably superb no matter which of its three available tape-degradation states you pick – and watch out for the last two settings on the division switch, which send different delay times to left and right outputs.

That just leaves the Golden Reverberator, which also sounds extra-majestic in stereo but is geared towards conventional 'verbs rather than overblown soundscapes – it drips but it doesn't shimmer.

The Reverberator is no less of an audio delight than the others. It covers a range of springs, plates and halls with immaculate hi-fi quality, and you have plenty of control over tone, modulation and pre-delay, as well as the sheer scale of the reverb. It does somehow feel like the least memorable of the three units but perhaps that's simply the nature of reverb; it's destined to live quite literally in the background.

So how do these three pedals compare to the competition purely in terms of tone? Honestly, at this end of the market, a fair chunk of that comes down to personal taste. But we will say this: nothing else we've tried is categorically better… and we doubt that many players would be happy to swap for anything cheaper after a day of getting to know them. **G**

Astral projections: the Astra's fuss-free array of modulation effects make it our pick of the bunch

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

ASTRA MODULATION MACHINE
PRICE £355
DESCRIPTION Digital multi-mode stereo modulation pedal, made in Malaysia
CONTROLS Speed, depth, intensity, shade, shape; toggle switches for effect type, preset store and sound A/B, rotary mode switch; manual/bypass and preset/bypass footswitches
FEATURES Mono/stereo inputs and outputs, USB-C for firmware updates and registration, Bluetooth for app control; switchable true or buffered bypass (via app); powered by 9-volt mains supply only (minimum 400mA)
DIMENSIONS 141 x 92 x 65mm
CONTACT uaudio.com

9/10 **An irresistible array of top-class modulation effects stuffed into one tidy little box**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Wampler Terraform **£299**
Alexander Wavelength **£199**
Electro-Harmonix Mod 11 **£128**

KEY FEATURES

STARLIGHT ECHO STATION
PRICE £355
DESCRIPTION Digital multi-mode stereo delay pedal, made in Malaysia
CONTROLS Delay time, feedback, mix, time division, color, modulation; toggle switches for effect type, preset store and sound A/B/C; manual/bypass and preset/bypass footswitches
FEATURES Mono/stereo inputs and outputs, USB-C for firmware updates and registration, Bluetooth for app control; analogue dry-through except with preamp coloration applied, switchable true or buffered bypass (via app); powered by 9-volt mains supply only (minimum 400mA)
DIMENSIONS 141 x 92 x 65mm

8/10 **A multi-mode delay with limited functionality but utterly addictive faux-analogue sounds**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Boss DD-500 **£359**
Walrus Audio D1 **£279**
Line 6 DL4 **£255**

KEY FEATURES

GOLDEN REVERBERATOR
PRICE £355
DESCRIPTION Digital multi-mode stereo reverb pedal, made in Malaysia
CONTROLS Decay, pre-delay, mix, bass, treble, modulation; toggle switches for effect type, preset store and sound A/B/C; manual/bypass and preset/bypass footswitches
FEATURES Mono/stereo inputs and outputs, USB-C for firmware updates and registration, Bluetooth for app control; analogue dry-through, switchable true or buffered bypass (via app); powered by 9-volt mains supply only (minimum 400mA)
DIMENSIONS 141 x 92 x 65mm

8/10 **This reverb machine is easy to recommend in terms of pure tone, but it has many rivals**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Eventide BlackHole **£279**
Strymon BlueSky **£275**
Neunaber Immerse MkII **£249**

CARR AMPLIFIERS
SUPER BEE 112

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Utilising some unusual valves and sporting a range of tones inspired by classic Fenders, the Super Bee packs a fearsome sting at home and stage-friendly volumes

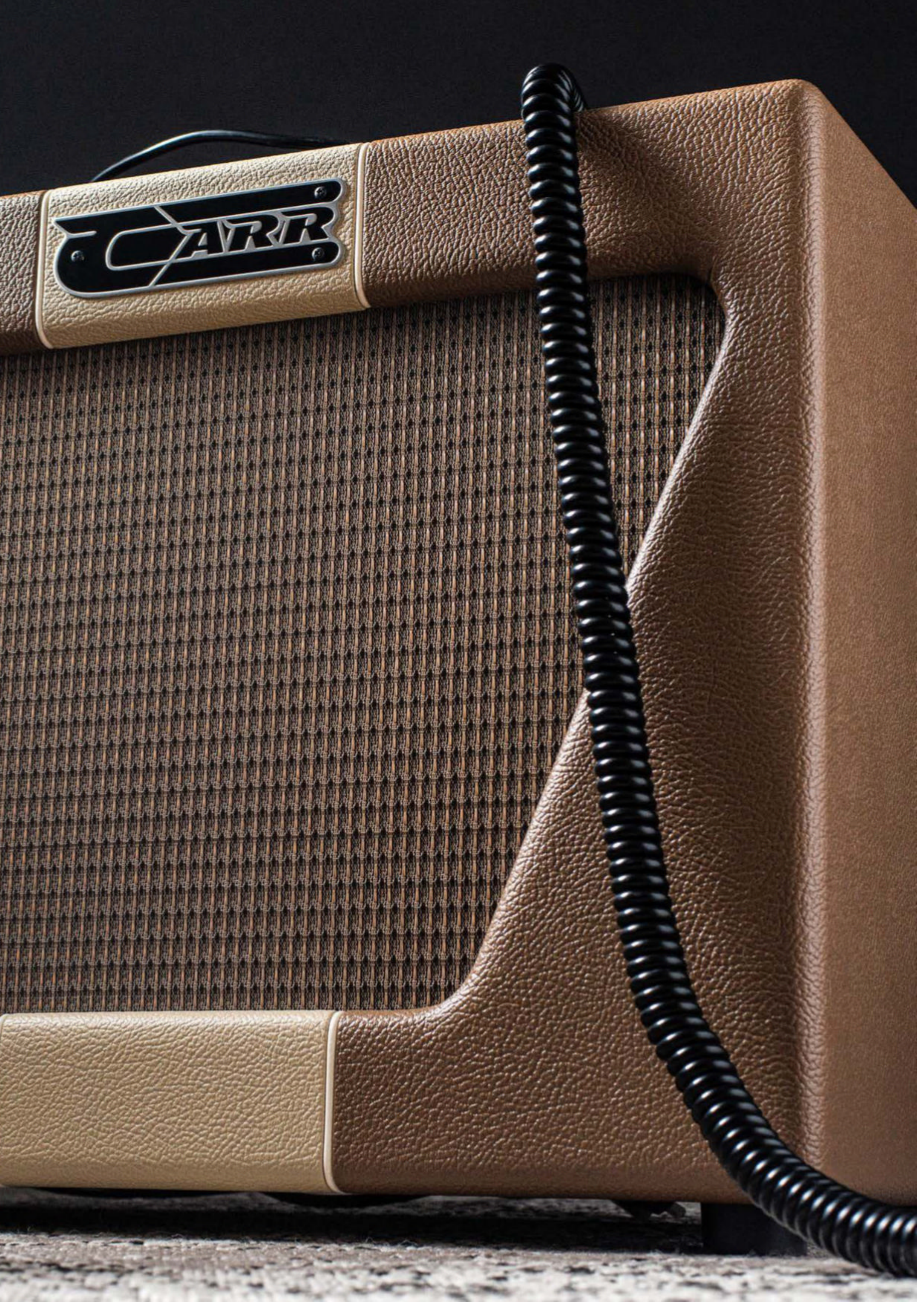
The Super Bee first emerged from Carr's North Carolina workshop at the tail end of 2020 and has already created a considerable buzz. Dressed here in two-tone blonde and brown tolex, the Super Bee is designed around a cathode bias 10-watt circuit with spring reverb and EZ81/6CA4 rectification, as well as a built-in attenuator.

Genuine point-to-point amp construction of the standard you'll find here is pretty rare in modern amp-building but, as evidenced by other amps in the Carr range, it results in outstanding reliability and touch-sensitive tonal response. To achieve its stated aim of obtaining Super Reverb-inspired tones at the more restrained volume levels required by modern players, Carr has chosen to power the Super Bee with rather unusual 6BM8/ECL82 triode pentode valves, which feature one high-gain triode preamp tube and one pentode power tube in a single glass envelope.

6BM8 valves have a power dissipation of about seven watts, and in a push-pull output stage like the Super Bee's, you can expect roughly 65 per cent of the total dissipation in relatively clean output power. Carr states that the pair of 6BM8 valves generate an output of about nine watts clean and approximately 10 watts when fully cranked.

Though they're uncommon in guitar amplification, 6BM8 valves are still in production and, in their British denomination ECL82, feature in one of our favourite-sounding amps of all time: the rare 1960s Watkins Westminster. For plate dissipation comparison, understanding that the more familiar 6V6 delivers about 14 watts and an EL84 approximately 12 watts should give some pointers to the ballpark output of the 6BM8-loaded Super Bee.

With a single-channel control set inspired by Fullerton's finest, plugging into the Super Bee provides a ride that should feel instantly familiar to many.


CARR

Speak volumes: the Super Bee's attenuator is one of the very best we've heard

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,549
DESCRIPTION 1x12 single-channel valve combo amplifier with point-to-point wiring and spring reverb, made in the USA
POWER RATING 10W
VALVES 2x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6BM8, 1x EZ81
CONTROLS Volume, three-position Sting rotary mode switch (64, 68, 72), treble, middle, bass, reverb, attenuation (switchable between full power and "two watts to whisper" mode)
LOUDSPEAKER 1x12" custom-voiced 8-ohm Carr Valiant
FOOTSWITCH No
EFFECTS LOOP No
DIMENSIONS 533 x 451 x 250mm
WEIGHT 17kg/37lb
OPTIONS Super Bee 110 with Eminence Copperhead speaker (£2,399), various covering options (see website)
CONTACT coda-music.com, carramplifiers.com

The Sting control, however, is an intriguing addition. A three-way rotary switch, it promises three distinct tonal voices: the first, 64, is inspired by a lower-gain, mid-scooped early 1960s tone; the second, 68, is the classic black-panel medium gain Super Reverb-style clean-to-crunch; and the third, 72, is the highest gain setting, which delivers more drive and punch.

IN USE

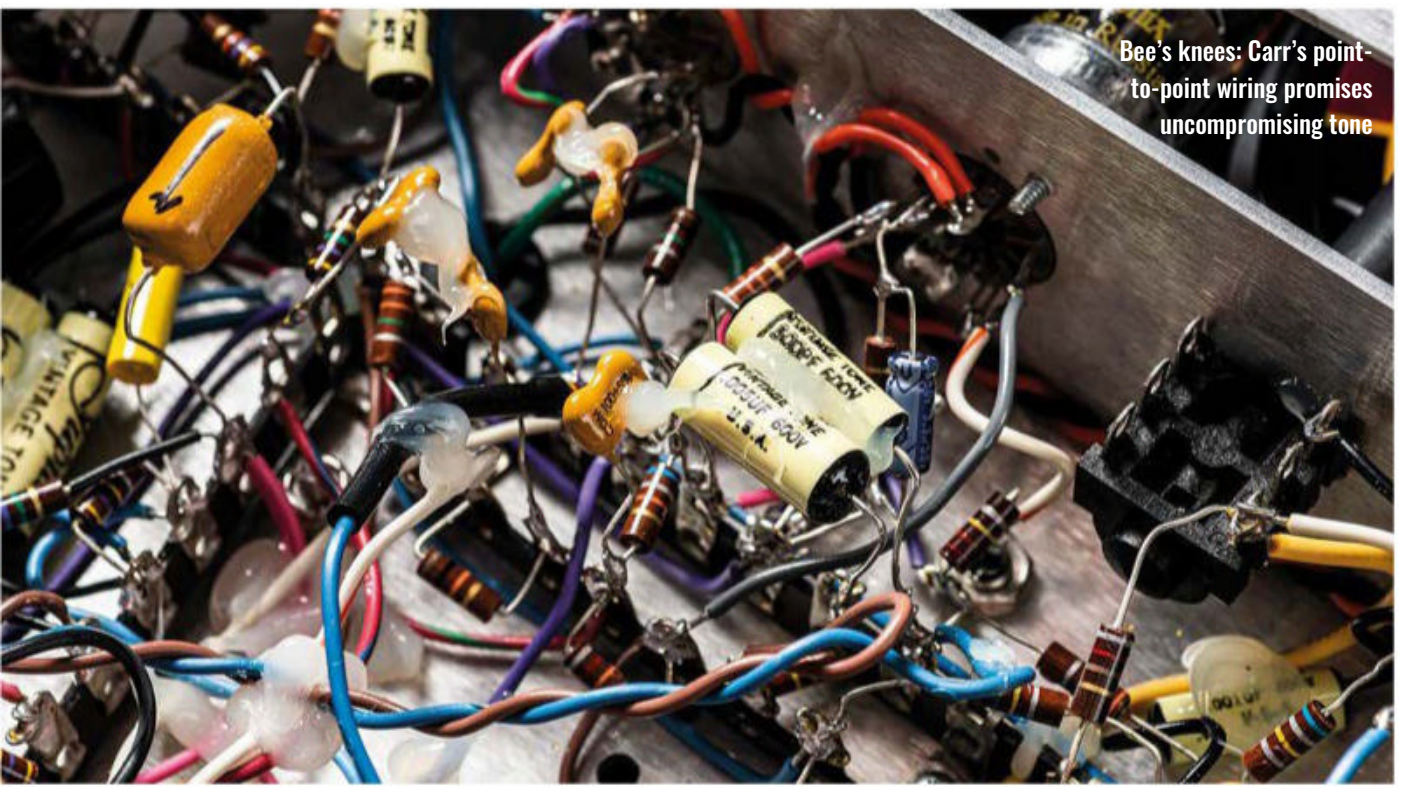
Grabbing our rosewood-'board Strat, we begin with the Sting control on 64, with the volume set just below half and all EQs at noon. We are immediately reminded of playing a well-sorted and great-sounding old Deluxe or Princeton Reverb. Chords and single notes ring out with all the chime, touch sensitivity and dynamics you could ask for, all wrapped up in that gorgeous glassy top-end sparkle and mid-scooped tonality that recalls a thousand hit records from the 1960s.

Despite their reputation for crystalline cleanliness, vintage Fenders of the black-panel era are capable of some beautiful overdrive tones and, on cue, upping the Super Bee's volume drives the amp into a sweet natural break-up, even with a Strat. Switching to an ES-335 brings on the break-up even earlier and unlocks some glorious blues tones from BB King to Mike Bloomfield.

We drag out our old workhorse 1964 Fender Deluxe Reverb for comparison and are left remarkably impressed by the Super Bee's ability to capture the tone and feel of the vintage amp. Indeed, we'd have no qualms about using the Carr at a recording session in place of the vintage amp. It really is that good.

Much like the black-panel Fenders on whose lauded shoulders the Super Bee clearly stands, the Carr positively devours overdrive pedals – used with a mid-rich Tube Screamer, it's simply a match made in heaven. Fuzzes, meanwhile, have plenty of punch, and delays and modulations swirl with beautiful three-dimensional abandon.

Name your poison: the Sting control offers three distinct voices


Bee's knees: Carr's point-to-point wiring promises uncompromising tone

The generous solid pine cabinet and 12-inch Carr Valiant speaker combine to negate any hint of midrange boxiness, instead imparting the quick punchy attack and taut low-end response beloved of the owners of larger vintage Fender amps. And the onboard reverb is every bit the drippy Fender-inspired ambience you'd expect, only with far less background noise than our vintage unit.

Switching to the 68 mode on the Sting control sees the Super Bee morph into something bigger, bolder and more aggressive. It's this mode in particular that nails the cranked vintage Super Reverb vibe, lending a stinging attack to riffs and single notes with a tight and punchy low end. Increasing the midrange offers creamy touch-sensitive overdrive that reacts remarkably well to playing dynamics, all without the eye-watering volume and back-breaking weight associated with an original 4x10 Super Reverb combo. Show it a Strat and a Screamer and you'll be in Texas blues heaven.

Switching to the 72 mode increases the drive and punch even further, and the accompanying midrange push seems to give proceedings a looser low-end feel that edges more towards loud brown-era and even tweed tones. Rich vibrant cleans blend readily into beautiful harmonic drive and sustain for days with our Les Paul. You might expect an amp design that namechecks the Super Reverb as an influence to deliver honeyed clean tones but the sheer quality of the girthsome overdrive that the Super Bee produces is an unexpected treat.

It's at this juncture that the onboard attenuator deserves special mention. It allows access to a remarkable range of clean and overdriven tones at reasonable volume levels, and means that the Super Bee can deliver everything from a powerful 10 watts to almost whisper-quiet late-night volume levels, making it just about the perfect home and studio companion. We're even able to jam along with an iPad backing track, reminding us exactly how inspiring we find real valve overdrive in a practice setting compared to even the best digital approximations thereof. Unmic'd and in full-power mode, the Super Bee should keep up with any sensible drummer. But it will excel when accompanying singers and acoustic instruments and, if you do mic it, it will tackle any gig with ease.

Along with the tonal range of a vintage Fender amp collection, the Super Bee boasts uncompromising build quality, exquisite styling and a big-amp feel at real-world volumes. It's very close to being one amp to rule them all, and only the addition of a vintage-style tremolo circuit and footswitchable Sting modes would sweeten the deal. In every other respect, this is vintage-informed amp-making at its finest. G

9/10 **With a wide range of Fender-inspired tones, more overdrive than expected and a superb attenuator, this is the ultimate home, studio and small-gig companion**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender '65 Deluxe Reverb **£1,599**
Lazy J J10LC **£2,516**
Matchless Laurel Canyon 112R **£2,995**

YAMAHA
THR30IIA

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Yamaha's THR range popularised the lifestyle amp format – but do you really need one of these for your acoustic guitar?

Blurring the lines between dedicated line-array acoustic amp, mixer, digital audio interface and portable sound system, the THR30IIA is a striking product in a browner shade of beige than its siblings in the THR-II series. It's well suited to living rooms but the front grille and metal handle mean it's robust enough for use in the wild too, while the control panel bristles with more bells and whistles than most players might associate with acoustic performance.

There's a separate mic/instrument channel with Yamaha's combined D-Pre XLR/jack input and its own dedicated gain, reverb and volume controls that could come in handy for vocals or a stereo pickup system. But the lion's share of the amp's functionality, at least on the surface, belongs to the guitar channel. This features a four-section approach that allows you to get tonally involved on an almost molecular level.

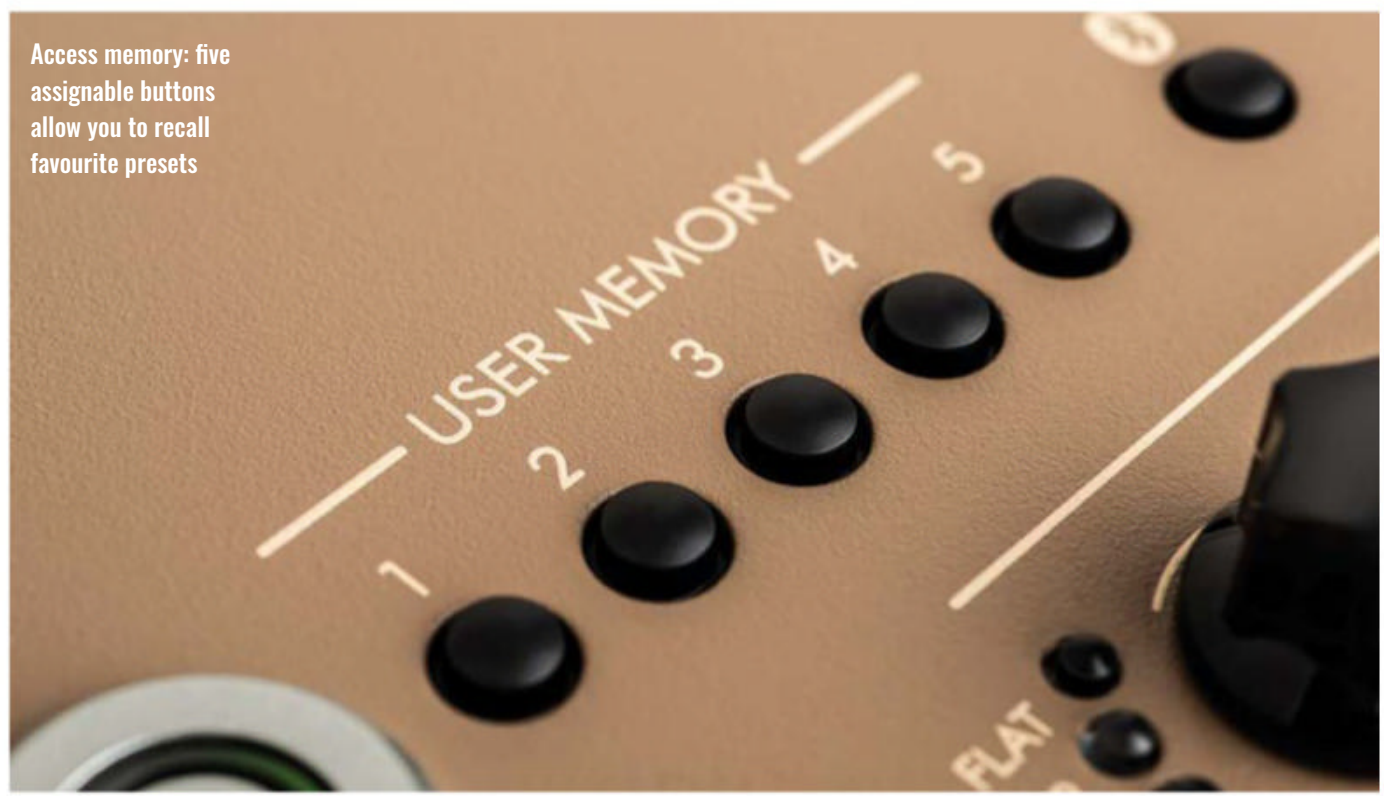
At the heart of the guitar channel is the tone select control – a deeply naughty piece of machinery that allows access to three blendable simulated microphone sounds (more on which later), a dedicated nylon-string voice and a flat setting for use on the off-chance that the sound coming straight from your guitar is just too delicious to tamper with.

Next up is a small three-way stereo imager switch that, as the name might suggest, takes advantage of the THR's twin-speaker/twin-horn design to offer varying degrees of spread, from normal to wide to wider. This is coupled with a three-band EQ section, an effect control that offers varying degrees of chorus and/or delay, as well as a reverb control that boasts both long and short-tail varieties.

Second nature: the combined jack/XLR input could come in handy for vocals

In addition to all this, the master volume should have you covered in a wide variety of acoustic settings. But wait – there's more. Do you want immediate access to up to five assignable presets? Want to play along with backing tracks via Bluetooth or an auxiliary input? Fancy using a Line 6 Relay G10T wireless transmitter so you don't have cables trailing across the room? Want to plug straight into your Mac or PC via USB and record using the bundled Cubase DAW? Go ahead – it's all there.

Those of you looking to further immerse yourself will find the accompanying Yamaha THR Remote app almost irresistible, as it promises to provide an even deeper level of control via smartphone or tablet. With that in mind, we download the iOS version, tune up and get ready.



Access memory: five assignable buttons allow you to recall favourite presets

Take effect: with the THR's built-in effects, you can dial in a sound to suit your playing style

IN USE

Plugging in a Kostal Modified Dreadnought with its K&K passive pickup, we go straight in with the flat setting illuminated on the tone select control (in this case, the tone blend control adds gain rather than any wet/dry manoeuvres). With all of the EQ knobs set to noon and just a kiss of reverb, we're rewarded with a warm and natural sound that is very good indeed. Back in the day, this was all anyone would reasonably expect of an acoustic amp and would be worth the price of entry alone. But these are new and interesting times and, as such, we must delve further.

It is with the modelled microphone voices and the blend knob that we find the THR30IIA's most fertile ground. The condenser voice is open and airy in a way that suggests we're hearing a model of a small-diaphragm mic rather than a great big U 87. The dynamic voice delivers an SM57 vibe with a mid-heavy and immediate sound, just the thing for cutting through a live mix. The tube microphone simulator might be the weakest of the three in that it begins to sound distant the more of it you blend in. But dial in just a touch and it can be a very effective tool.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this system is that, rather than stamping their identity on your sound, the way an EQ might, the microphone models allow your playing-hand position and attack to maintain an active role in proceedings while putting the aural equivalent of an Instagram filter over the sound. It's a musical approach that encourages creativity.

We also give the nylon-string voice a workout with a Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar with, it has to be said, sensational results for both classical and bossa nova approaches.

Reassured of the quality of the 'clean' sounds, we plunge into the potentially polarising waters of acoustic chorus and delay. This process is made more immediate thanks to the THR app, which not only allows for instantaneous control over the effects selection but also unlocks added perks such as a compressor and reverb EQ. If you're looking for more than just a natural sound, this could be all you need. You can also mess with its head – using the nylon-string voice on a steel-string instrument, for example, gives us a frighteningly good Dobro sound!

Audio influencer: the modelled mic sounds can lay an attractive filter over your playing

Get connected: line and USB outs ensure versatility at home, on stage and in the studio

Whether the THR30IIA becomes your acoustic amp of choice depends on a few factors. Firstly, it's not very loud. Yes, it's rated at 30 watts (if you rely on battery power alone, you're looking at half that) but it's not the pokiest amp of its kind.

If that's an issue, you can use the line outputs on the back panel to send it to an external PA. But that possibly defeats the object. Secondly, the D-Pre does not offer phantom power, which means your options are mostly limited to dynamic microphones.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £570
DESCRIPTION Desktop acoustic amplifier powered by mains or rechargeable battery, made in China
POWER RATING 30W (15W + 15W) or 15W (7.5W + 7.5W) with battery power
CONTROL PANEL On/off switch with in-built tuner and battery indicator. Bluetooth, 5x assignable user memory buttons. Guitar channel: 1/4-inch jack input, tone select, stereo imager, tone blend, bass, middle, treble, effect (chorus, chorus/delay, delay), reverb (short/long), volume. Microphone channel: combined jack/XLR input, gain, reverb, volume
REAR PANEL USB audio, 2x 1/4-inch jack line outs
SPEAKERS 2x 3.5" full-range speakers + horns
ADDITIONAL FEATURES Added functionality with THR Remote mobile app, including compressor and effects parameters. Bundled with Cubase AI for Mac/PC and Cubase LE for iPad
DIMENSIONS 420 x 195 x 155mm
WEIGHT 4.4kg/9.7lb
CONTACT uk.yamaha.com

Finally the sound of the amp, in particular the bass frequencies, is very sensitive to placement; we got wildly differing results depending on its position and the type of surface on which we placed it.

All that said, if you're an acoustic player looking for a single source of sonic truth that'll handle almost anything you throw at it with minimum fuss, Yamaha's latest THR should definitely be on your shortlist.

9/10 **An impressive hybrid of lifestyle product and gig-box for intimate venues**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Blackstar Sonnet 60 **£349**
Fishman Loudbox Artist Bluetooth **£499**
Acus One-5T **£499**

GONE FISHING EFFECTS
SIMON NEIL BOOOOOM / BLAST

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS ED OLESZKO

The Biffy Clyro guitarist has one of the most monstrous live guitar tones we've ever heard. Could his guitar tech possibly capture it in stompbox form?

In the midst of the pandemic, Biffy Clyro's longtime guitar tech, Richard 'Churd' Pratt of Gone Fishing Effects, set about collaborating with the band's frontman Simon Neil on a combined overdrive and fuzz pedal. Not only did the box have to stand up to the considerable rigours of touring but Simon issued Richard a rather intimidating brief too.

According to Richard, "It had to be the loudest pedal we can make! It had to have less knobs, be loads of fun and should give people a bit of a fright." The resulting unit was named after *Booooom*, *Blast & Ruin* from Biffy Clyro's 2009 album *Only Revolutions*, with the pedal's cosmetics echoing the artwork from 2020 LP *A Celebration Of Endings*.

Each Booooom / Blast enclosure was even hand-painted and signed by Simon Neil himself. Though the first batch of 200 quickly sold out via the Biffy Clyro webstore, as we type this, Richard is busy creating more.

Containing separate overdrive and fuzz circuits within the same box, Blast is a "wild transistor fuzz effect", while Booooom is a "thick, aggressive germanium-diode overdrive". Both effects are activated by independent true-bypass footswitches, while around the back, separate in and out connections for each side of the pedal mean that you can either run it straight in front of your amp or assign the fuzz and overdrive to separate loops within a pedal-switching system.

Booooom box: flexible connectivity makes this unit pedalboard-friendly

Kick up a stink: the pedal is capable of huge gain and volume levels

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £299
DESCRIPTION Overdrive and fuzz pedal, made in the UK
CONTROLS Booooom: stink (gain), jaggy (tone), bang (output level). Blast: syrup (gain), stress (output level)
FEATURES True-bypass switching. Independent input and output jacks for each side of the effect (internally combined if not using an external pedal switching system). 9V DC mains power only
DIMENSIONS 167 x 115 x 78mm
CONTACT gonefishingeffects.com

GONE FISHING EFFECTS

IN USE

Connecting the pedal to a 9V power supply reveals dual blue LEDs that glow dimly when the effect is bypassed and brightly when engaged. This feature resulted from Simon's frustration at kicking pedals on in the heat of battle in the past only to find they weren't connected to power.

Plugging a rosewood-'board Strat into a clean Deluxe Reverb and engaging the Booooom overdrive, its asymmetrical clipping generates a gritty and very amp-like roar, from a warm and subtle boost right up to thunderous overdrive. It's extremely touch-sensitive and it responds to picking-hand dynamics much like an old tweed amp – hit harder and notes begin to crunch, bloom and sustain.

The tone control (labelled 'jaggy') boasts a seriously full sweep, from dark to stinging. Every bit as impressive with a Les Paul into a Vox AC30, Booooom pulls off that rare trick of making your core tone sound bigger when engaged.

Switching to the Blast side, we're greeted with a colossal 60s fuzz tone that morphs into joyous square wave fuzz with infinite sustain at a twist of the 'syrup' control. Both circuits stack exceptionally well, and the uncompressed clarity and sheer weight of the tone remains a welcome constant.

The headroom and clarity came at Simon's request. "However heavy it got, a Strat's voice still had to clearly shine through," says Richard. But did the Booooom / Blast fulfil its brief in terms of sheer volume? Yes.

This thing is capable of staggeringly loud output levels if required, making it perfect for a band whose startling dynamic shifts have been known to shock audience members into dropping their drinks.

For Biffy Clyro's legions of fans, this is a no-brainer purchase. But anyone looking for a unique-sounding drive and fuzz pedal that's endlessly creative and enormous fun should check out the Booooom / Blast too.

9/10 **Gigantic overdrive and fuzz tones suitable for setting moshpits alight**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley D&M Drive **£229**
Analogman Sun Lion **$435**
Strymon Sunset **£279**

David Brown (centre) began tinkering with amps in the late 90s

INDUSTRY INSIDER

BROWNE AMPLIFICATION

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Quickly adopted by session players and pedal enthusiasts alike, the Browne Protein is now widely regarded as one of the best new overdrives in the business. We talk to founder David Brown about the influence of broken AC30s and getting the pedal on tour with Bon Jovi…

How did you get into guitar?

"My dad played guitar when I was growing up, and I kind of became obsessed with the guitar really early. I started out on classical when I was little and picked up electric in my early teens and couldn't put it down. I just played all day. I remember the first time that I heard *Appetite for Destruction*. I was a young teenager and saw the way that people were reacting and the way that music made you feel. From there, I kind of found Led Zeppelin and then Hendrix blew my mind."

At what point did you start building or tinkering with effects pedals and amps?

"I started probably in 1998. I had a reissue Bassman and it died. I went to get it fixed and it was like $400 to get this amplifier fixed. Almost as much as the as I paid for the amplifier! I decided 'I've been working on cars my whole life, I ought to just learn how to fix my own amplifiers as well.' So, I started working on amplifiers. I had friends who had old Fenders and I started fixing up a lot of old Fenders and spent a bunch of years doing that. Eventually I just started building them, because I had buddies that wanted vintage amps and they were starting to get really expensive. The guy in my band wanted an AC30 but they'd catch fire, or they weren't really tour friendly. Unless you had like, you know, an army of techs with you. I built an AC30 that was okay and thought 'I can do this. This is as good as anything I've heard so I might as well build my own amps rather than buy them.'"

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"Six or seven years ago. A friend of mine, and a client, came to me and wanted me to make this pedal for him. He had two pedals that he was using that were working really well live, but he had some stuff he wanted modified. We kind of went down the rabbit hole of, 'How do we make both these pedals perfect for what you're doing, and then put them in one enclosure?' That's where the Protein came from. We launched that at the end of 2018. They started shipping in 2019, the actual production run. I took all my savings and bought enough stuff to make 100 of them. And I thought, 'Maybe I'll be able to sell enough to make my money back!' I'd been touring a tonne, but I've got kids and a wife at home, it was starting to get really difficult to be gone all the time. I thought if I can make this thing go, maybe I won't have to tour as much when my kids are little. They sold out so fast that I was like, 'I don't know what's going on here, but I've got to figure out how to make this a real business!'"

Did you have any external investment starting out?

"No, we've been really lucky in that we've been able to grow organically, and we've always had more demand than we've had

supply. It's been more playing the game of trying to keep up with demand, parts shortages, and crazy things like that. Since we weren't like trying to launch a whole bunch of different products or build massive amounts of pedals, we've just always kind of kept it in house."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"I've got to throw that all at Adam [Sniegowski], my guy who I built this [Protein] for and who's been my partner. He's the aesthetic guy, and he's who I look to when I think that something is good or done. I was like, 'Just put it in a box, it doesn't matter.' We went for this vintage, Ham Radio military aesthetic with the badges. I hadn't really seen anything like that at that point. It seemed really cool and people really loved it. We feel really lucky."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"It's the Protein by far. Adam was touring a tonne with fly dates and backline shows where he would not always get the amp that he wanted. He needed something that even if he had to go direct would give him the colours that he needed. It was really a trial by fire. We tested a lot live because it's got to work in that environment. There's a lot of really amazing, beautiful gear that sounds amazing if you're playing by yourself, but the stuff that we're trying to put into production is stuff that works in a live setting."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"I got to hang out with Drew Shirley from Switchfoot. Their record *Hello, Hurricane* was a big record for me. He was on tour with a friend of mine, we were hanging out and I showed him the Protein, he loved it and wanted to put one on his board. Then they did a tour with Bon Jovi and I got a call from John Shanks and Phil X, who wanted Proteins for their tour of South America, so they each bought two. Then David Ryan Harris got a hold of a Protein and told me it was his favourite pedal! That guy is the kindest soul, he was one of those guys that it just clicked with."

What are the biggest opportunities for the guitar industry in 2021?

"I don't know that I have the wisdom to speak to what the industry needs. I think keeping quality products in stock and continue to develop new stuff is just the name of the game for us right now, at least.

"I've seen a lot of really cool collaboration stuff that didn't require tonnes of money to do because people were in their homes, and they couldn't get together. To see people making records from their homes, collaborating with friends, there's been some really brilliant stuff that's come out and I think we're about to see a lot more.

"It's been brilliant for gear sales, because a lot of people are just stuck at home and a lot of people picked up the guitar again. That makes me really excited that there's a lot of new players or a lot of people who'd put it away that have realised the value of music or have found love for guitar."

What's next for Browne Amplification?

"We're going to do the blue side of the Protein on its own. We've had a lot of guys ask for that in a standalone pedal, so we're gonna do that."

Find out more at browneamps.com

SHOP TALK

BILL ASHER
ASHER GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER
PHOTOGRAPHY ASHER GUITARS

A rare modern guitar maker who's had as much success with lap steels as he has with Spanish-style electric guitars, Bill Asher has also logged an impressive number of star clients

Such is Bill Asher's humility that he won't steer the discussion toward his long list of big-name customers until nearly forced to go there, and that he never drops even the slightest hint that he's the scion of Hollywood royalty. Asher nearly single-handedly rejuvenated the modern manufacture of electric lap steels after collaborating with slide star Ben Harper back in 1998, and has since numbered star steelers Robert Randolph, Cindy Cashdollar, Greg Leisz, Emily Robison, Ed Williams and many others in his client list.

Regarding that latter claim to fame, if the name of TV sitcom *Bewitched* rings fewer bells in the UK than it does in the US, suffice to say it was one of the most popular American TV shows of the 1960s and early 70s. The series featured Asher's mother, Elizabeth Montgomery, in the starring role of Samantha, with the majority of episodes in its eight-year run directed by his father, William Asher (also the director of the mother of all American sitcoms, *I Love Lucy*). But again, it simply doesn't come up. Understandably, perhaps, since it has nothing to do with guitar making. And Bill Asher is all about guitar making. Since the epiphanic moment in high-school wood shop when Asher realised that he could actually make a guitar with his own two hands, that was all he wanted to do – the draw of college and the lure of Tinseltown be damned.

I WANT TO MAKE A GUITAR

"I was always a creative kid," says Asher. "I liked arts and music, I was a skateboarder and I liked the whole cool culture of that scene. And in the 70s, all my favourite bands were guitar-heavy kinda stuff: Led Zeppelin and Eric Clapton. I started taking guitar lessons. A couple friends of mine played, and that's when I got hooked. So it was early high school when I started playing guitar, in garage bands and all that."

It didn't take long, though, for the lure of the making to overtake that of the playing.

"I liked working with my hands and I took a wood-shop class in my senior year in high school. I started doing woodworking and realising that guitars are made of wood. In my senior year you could pick a project,

Asher has built more than 1,200 lap steel instruments since his first in 1998

so I brought in my first great guitar, a black Strat that my stepmom Joyce got me when I was 15, and I showed that to Mr Rosenthall in wood shop. I'd built a box, I'd built a cabinet, and I said, 'I want to build a guitar!' I made the body out of a really pretty piece of wood there, and I had to buy a neck because he didn't think we could reverse-engineer the neck."

But where to acquire a neck? It would seem a cliché to say, 'at Guitar Center, of course'. But the outlet originated in Hollywood in 1959, and was a regional California chain before exploding into the dominant guitar-gear franchise in North America. Back in the 80s, the local Guitar Center had exactly the Charvel replacement neck that the young Bill Asher was looking for, and the capstone project to a budding career was complete.

"After I graduated from high school in 1982, I brought that first guitar to a local shop next to West LA Music called L&M Guitar Repair," he says. "Jeff Lunsford owned the shop. I'd never been there before, and I walked in with it – I was on summer vacation and did not want to go to college [laughs]. I showed him what I had done at school and he was kind of impressed. He called me a couple weeks later and said, 'Hey, I'm starting on a new guitar – I don't normally have people watch me but come on down'. That started a four-year apprenticeship."

STAR GUITARS

As it had been for many years – and perhaps as it always shall be – LA was at that time the centre of an intense feedback loop in which great guitarists fed work to great guitar repairers, who in turn fed expertly maintained, modified and set-up guitars back to them for tours and studio sessions. This locale and that job – as well as others, including setting up his own repair shop for a time, and later working a long stint with design guru Rick Turner – not only helped Asher forge the skills that he needed in the trade but also introduced him to a legion of top-flight players. Through them, he was able to lay his hands on the elite vintage and custom guitars that proved essential to honing his talents.

"I mean, you can't make mistakes on guitars like that," he says. "When you're working on other people's instruments – there's a lot of pressure in this business, especially when you're doing repairs and stuff. I don't know how it all lined up for me but Rick Turner, being one of the great designers behind Alembic, he was an electronics wizard and he knew so much about guitar production and building on a very high-end level. Those guitars they did for the Grateful Dead are iconic still; that stuff is just amazing."

Turner's clientele didn't end with the Grateful Dead. Asher also got to experience a parade of pro-quality gear handed over by some of the music world's most notable names.

"He had all of the pro clients, like Crosby, Stills and Nash," says Asher. "We had Jackson Browne – who I'd met early on in one of my first shops when I'd taken it over – and that job involved doing really professional high-end repairs. Like, D-45s of Crosby's would come in. Graham Nash and Jackson Browne were bringing stuff in. It was a whole 'nother level.

"Rick Turner was heavy in the acoustic guitar restoration world but he was at that time getting real busy doing his production guitars that he had built for Lindsey Buckingham. Those guitars would come in for refrets all the time and I kind of took over his repair and setup thing. After that, he moved to Santa Cruz, so I went back on my own and opened up my own shop in Santa Monica in '96. That's kind of, up to this date, what I've been doing. I met Ben Harper in 1998 and designed his lap steel, which has become the pretty solid go-to modern-day lap steel design."

LAP OF THE GODS

Like most career repairmen, Asher had put together the occasional one-off custom guitar on request over the years – bolt-neck Strat-style efforts and the like for customers who wanted something they couldn't get off the rack. But his building efforts began in earnest with that collaboration with Ben Harper.

"I designed that lap steel for him based off his 30s Weissenborn that he needed an electric version of," says Asher. "It's just the neck-through concept, redesigning that whole beautiful hourglass shape of the Weissenborn into an electric, oh my god, it was magic.

I built him two prototypes. That was in ’98. We’ve done 300 of them by now or something, of his signature model. And I’m up to about 1,200 lap steel builds since that first one in ’98.”

Although the lap steel wasn’t a particular passion of Asher’s before he met Harper, it’s a style that he took to easily. He also clearly saw the line as a way to distinguish himself as an all-rounder in a custom market flooded with makers who mostly concentrated on Spanish-style electrics:

“The lap steel, that’s where I felt like I could brand myself. It’s such a unique guitar, I wasn’t just building a Fender or Gibson knock-off. Then when I started my bolt-on series that followed, I love the Strat shape but I wanted to get away from that. I’ve always liked the offset bodies of the Mosrites and those types of guitars, so I designed my Strat and Tele styles as offset-bodies, and it creates a nice balance and different lines. I don’t want to make knock-offs. Then when I met Marc Ford in 2003, he was totally keen on that offset body shape, and that’s why we did his. He said, ‘I want you to take my favourite 50s Strat and my Les Paul Special, and make a hybrid’. And that became that double-P-90, mahogany-body offset. It’s like a Strat-style body, three-on-a-side headstock. That’s a cool hybrid.”

Asher’s Marc Ford signature guitar is a stylish combination of Strat and Les Paul Special influences

“WHEN I MET MARC FORD IN 2003, HE SAID, ‘I WANT YOU TO TAKE MY FAVOURITE STRAT AND MY LES PAUL SPECIAL AND MAKE A HYBRID’. THAT’S A COOL HYBRID”

THE T DELUXE

That’s not to say that Asher’s cornerstone six-string models, the S Custom and T Deluxe, are nothing but reshaped renditions of their Fullerton predecessors. As the thorough change-up of the Marc Ford Signature Model indicates, the maker has gone to pains to put extra muscle and versatility into these bolt-necks, and the expressed satisfaction of one notable client reflects his success in that venture.

In addition to working with Jackson Browne himself, Asher has found clients in two of Browne’s main sidemen, Val McCallum and Mark Goldenberg, and a T Deluxe crafted for the latter indicates the extent to which the template can be bent to fit all manner of alternative requirements.

“Mark bought one of my T Deluxe guitars because he was looking for something very versatile and liked the Tele-style guitar but that didn’t fit with Jackson’s tone,” says Asher. “So I lent him one and he fell in love with it on the Jackson tour with David Lindley.”

Asher had met pickup designer Pete Biltoft at the NAMM Show in 2007 or 2008 and floated the idea of blade poles and a bluesier bridge pickup with a super-versatile neck pickup. The pair got to work on what would become Asher’s T-Blade set.

“At the time, I was playing with Varitone ideas,” says Asher. “With the ToneStyler from Stellartone, I chose my favourite six positions of this tone sweep, and position six is actually bypassed. It’s a passive network, and I wanted to keep everything passive but give players a palette. A lot of guys like the Varitone in the studio – and live too – but when you have time to sit with it, you find that it’s super-useful.

"So, the T Deluxe has two pickups, three-way selector, volume, tone, just like a Tele, and you've got the little extra EQ switch. But what's cool about the pickups is the bridge pickup by itself is definitely bluesier, honkier. That's what people usually wanted, to play Teles in blues and rock, so it gives you that. And the neck pickup is super clear. You can get great Strat neck pickup tones with it wide open, and then with the Varitone you start rolling that back on the neck pickup and it's like jazz land, killer. And then when you put both pickups on together when they're in parallel it just sounds like the Tele bridge pickup. For some reason, those two just worked out that way, so all positions are good."

STICKY POCKET

The essential parts of Asher's formula tend to vary depending on whether he's constructing bolt-neck or set-neck guitars. But his approaches to both also have their commonalities. In particular, he seeks the resonance and sustain of a heavier instrument without the weight generally required to get there.

"I do like the neck-through construction," he says. "I do that both on my lap steels, and my Electro Sonic single-cutaway guitar. With those, I also do a string-

> “I TALK TO THE CUSTOMERS AS MUCH AS I CAN. I THINK THAT’S WHY THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE AND PLAYERS THAT SUPPORT ME THAT ARE NOT PROFESSIONALS”

through-body, instead of just a floating tailpiece, to create a lightweight guitar that gives you the sustain and resonance of a solidbody electric, where you otherwise need the extra weight of a Les Paul.

“That’s been part of the goal: light or medium-lightweight guitars with a lot of sustain. Then on the bolt-on stuff, I like to do that kind of angled heel, the neck pockets are tight, and I always choose the wood grain for the necks – be it flat sawn or quarter sawn – where the rings are tight. You want a nice dense piece of wood for the neck. And easy access to the truss rod, for all my guitars: it’s at the heel side, which is an extremely strong area of the neck. I’ve fixed too many broken headstocks over the years to put my truss-rod adjustment at the nut.”

Another of his resonance-inducing secrets involves a technique that might lead you to think it was applied by a builder rushing to finish and ship a guitar quickly. But for Asher, the sticky results are entirely intentional.

“Something I do to my bolt-neck guitars to make them feel really solid and hopefully never go out on you,” he says, “is brush a little bit of lacquer in there when I do the final setup, and get it strung up for the first time, so it sets the neck to the body. I found this from having to remove old Fender necks to do refrets. People often don’t want you to take the neck off an old guitar because they realise that the lacquer between the body and neck has kind of cured into each other over the years. A lot of old Fenders are kind of stuck on there. I thought, ‘Oh, that’s not a bad idea, to make that happen intentionally’. And you still pop ’em off easily enough when you need to, it’s not like a glued-on neck.”

Currently, Asher completes about 80 to 100 guitars a year. His shop is made up mainly of himself and his wife Jessica, with some help from his brother and stepbrother now and then – and that’s how he likes it.

“I talk to the customers as much as I can,” he says. “and doing the woodworking is what I really enjoy. I think that’s why, when I build people guitars, there are so many people and players that support me that are not pros. The thousands of guys I’ve built guitars for – local bands, people who are [day-job] professionals that love to go home and play guitar – you know, it just keeps me creative and constantly busy.”

Follow @asherguitars on Instagram for more

ABOVE Bill Asher’s ResoSonic Rambler is inspired by the 1957 Nash Rambler automobile

OPPOSITE Another automobile-influenced Asher design, this time a Shelby-inspired Model I lap steel

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DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO FIX SNAPPED SCREWS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Three of the screws snapped while the tuners were being installed on this brand-new neck. Will it turn out to be a costly mistake or a simple fix?

We've all seen used guitars with desperately wonky tuner installations, off-centre bridges and bridge screws at awkward angles. If you remove the parts, you'll often find that they're off-kilter because a screw head has snapped off, leaving the threaded section stuck in the wood.

Some of you may even have had screw heads snap when trying to force a screw into wood with a pilot hole that's just too narrow. Here, I'm going to show you how to craft a simple tool that will allow you to extract broken screws with minimal damage to the surrounding wood.

To make your screw extractor, you need a length of hollow metal tubing. The basic idea is to fabricate a hollow drill bit with which you can drill around the broken screw and simply lift it out. You'll be left with a fairly wide hole in the wood but that can always be plugged, levelled and re-drilled.

ON THE TUBE

When it comes to selecting your metal tube, you must ensure that the inside diameter is large enough to fit over the snapped screw. Remember: the diameter of the hole left in the wood after the screw has been extracted will be equal to the outer diameter of your metal tube. If you want to keep this as small as possible, be sure to check that the walls of your tube aren't too thick.

Having checked my local engineering supplies shops and metal merchants, I end up finding exactly what I need at B&Q (diy.com). For this project, I'll be extracting three snapped screws from a Telecaster-style headstock. The screws are about 2.5mm at their widest point, so I'm using a length of brass tube with an internal diameter of 3mm and an external diameter of 4mm. This means I'll be left with 4mm holes in the wood once each snapped screw has been removed.

1 Screws have snapped inside three of the tuner screw holes on this Tele-style headstock

2 Both of these snapped screws pose a problem

3 This snapped screw is standing proud of the surface and there is some chipping adjacent to the hole

CUTTING TEETH

Brass is a soft metal so I'm not expecting this tool to last a lifetime. I'm going to file cutting teeth into the end to turn a short length of tubing into a mini hole-cutting saw. Working with brass rather than steel ensures a much easier process here.

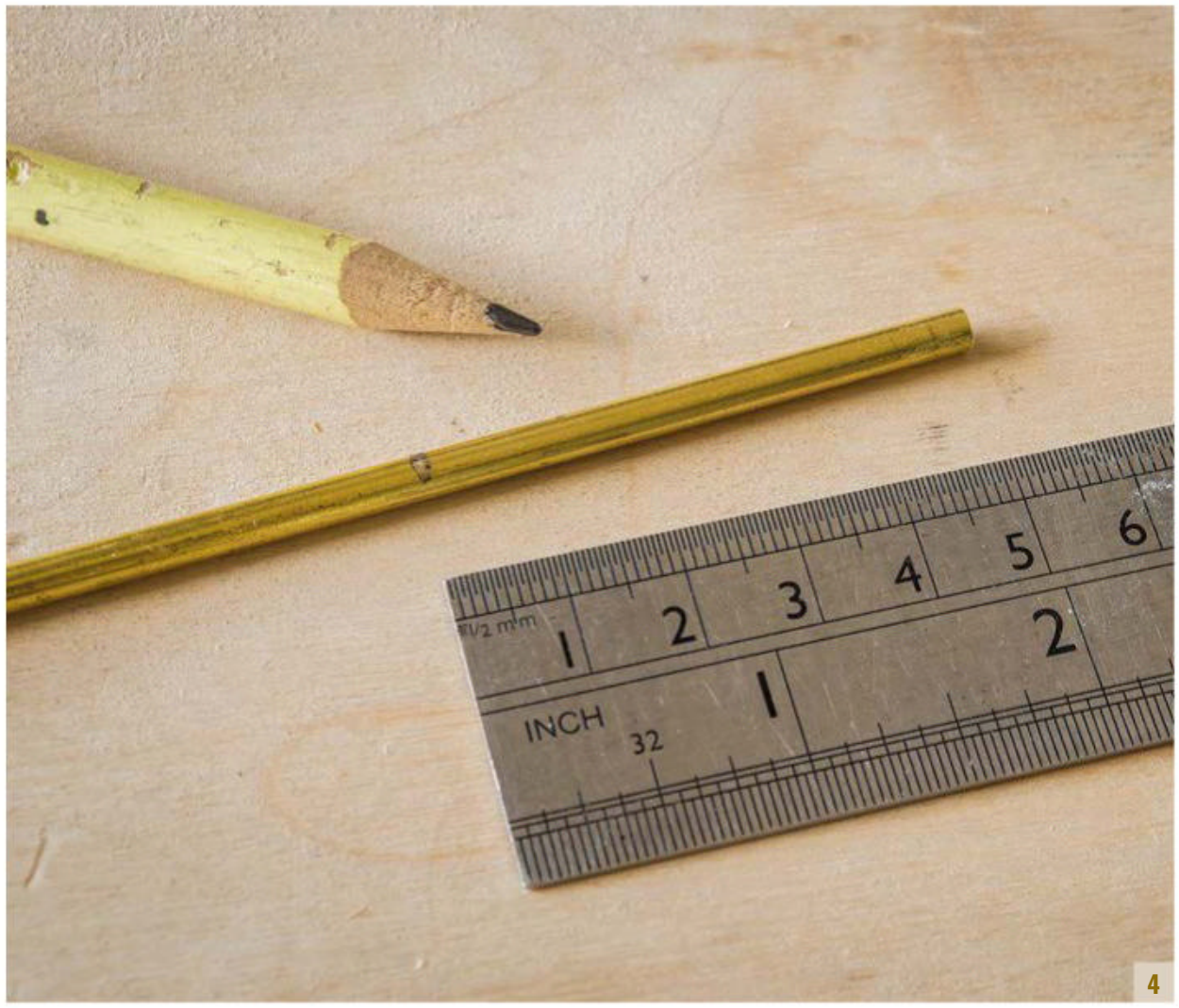
I begin by cutting off a 40mm length and cleaning off any burr with a flat needle file. To make the teeth, I place a triangular file across the centre line at one end and create two V shaped cuts. Altering the file's angle, I repeat this process twice more to end up with six cutting teeth. After a quick de-burr, I'm ready to see if it will cut into wood. The screw extractor slides around before the teeth grab but then it cuts into a piece of solid oak with surprising ease.

SLIPPING AWAY

Even regular drill bits sometimes slide around before getting their hole started, so I need a way to guide my newly crafted screw extractor into place without issue. An effective solution is to drill through a piece of clear acrylic to create a hole that's the same diameter as the tubing. Clamp it into position and the clear acrylic will make it easy to align your guide over the centre of the damaged screw hole. After a successful trial run on a scrap piece of wood, I'm ready to tackle the headstock.

REVERSING THE DAMAGE

Screws go in clockwise and come out anticlockwise, so I run the drill in reverse.



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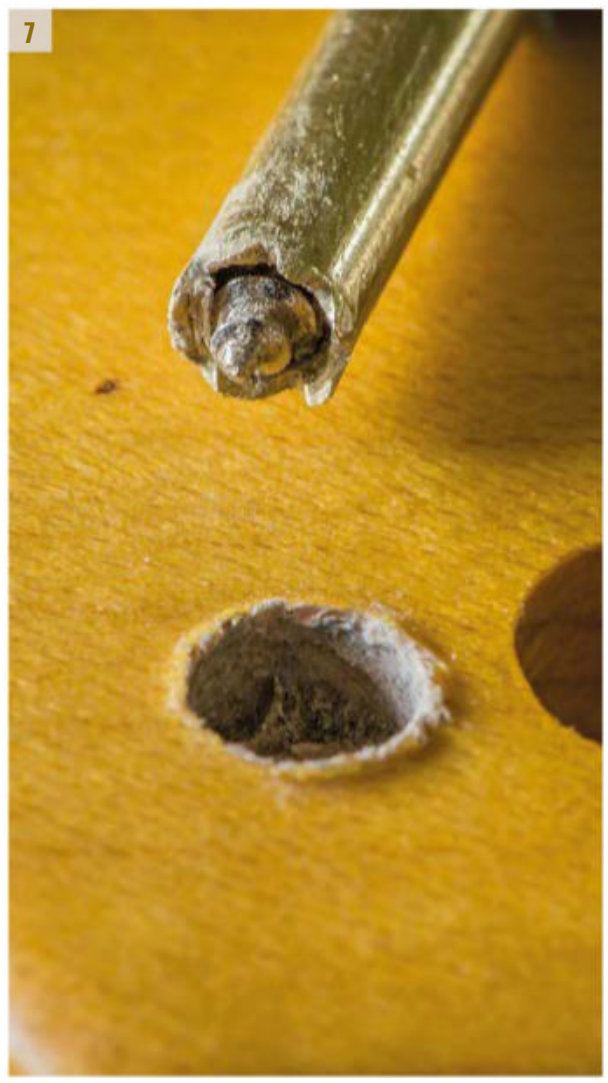

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4 This brass tube is 4mm wide with an internal diameter of 3mm. 50mm will be sawn off the end

5 A triangular file is used to create cutting teeth at one end but the inside and outside edges of the tool still need to be de-burred

6 A 4mm hole is drilled through some clear acrylic and clamped over the screw hole to guide the screw extractor

7 The first screw has been removed but is now wedged inside the extractor

The teeth will cut in both directions and the last thing I want is to force the screw deeper inside. Before starting, I measure the thickness of the headstock and the acrylic. From this, I can calculate the maximum depth that I'm able to drill. To mark that depth, I place masking tape on the tube, which should serve to stop me cutting straight through the front of the headstock – an additional problem I don't need.

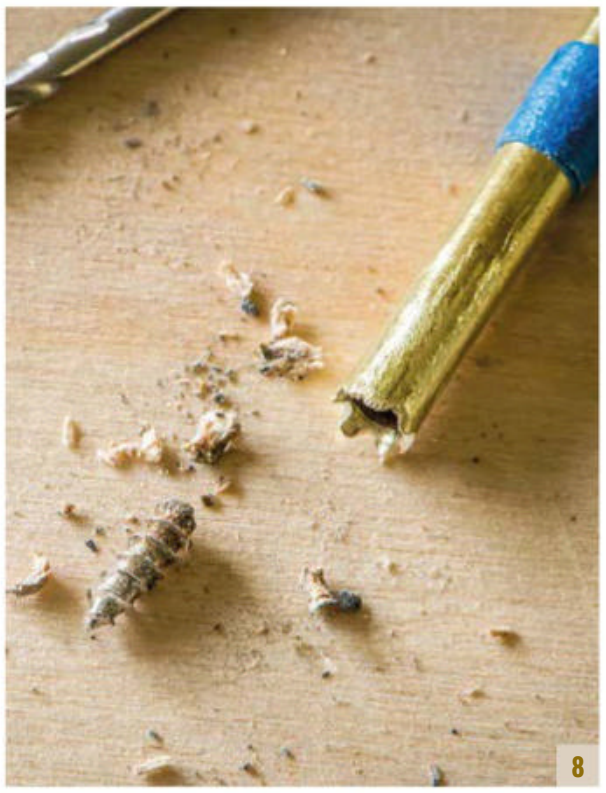
The first screw eventually comes out but extracting the brass tube is tricky because the steel screw causes the cutting teeth to flare outwards. The screw is wedged inside the tube as I lift it out. Tapping a drill bit through from the other end of the tube clears out the screw and wood debris.

I strongly suggest sourcing steel tubing but if you're forced to use a softer metal such as brass, you'll find it easier if the teeth aren't filed too deeply. But doing is often the best way to learn and, by the time I get to the third screw, the process has become a lot smoother.

FINISHING TOUCHES

It's fortunate that all evidence of this mishap will end up hidden under the tuner casings but the holes still have to be plugged because the tuners need fixing screws. The screw extraction has left me with one 5mm hole and two 4mm holes in the back of the headstock, so I need some doweling.

Maple would be ideal here but I've noticed that some suppliers are running low on stock these days. Instead, I opt for 6mm beech dowel, which I sand down to



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8 Pushing a drill bit through from the other end of the extractor clears out the screw and wood debris

9

9 Short lengths of dowel have been glued into the holes left by the extractor

10 Once the glue has dried, a flush cutting saw removes the excess dowel

11 Once the tuners are properly installed, all evidence of the repairs will be hidden

10

the required diameters using my hand drill and a sanding block.

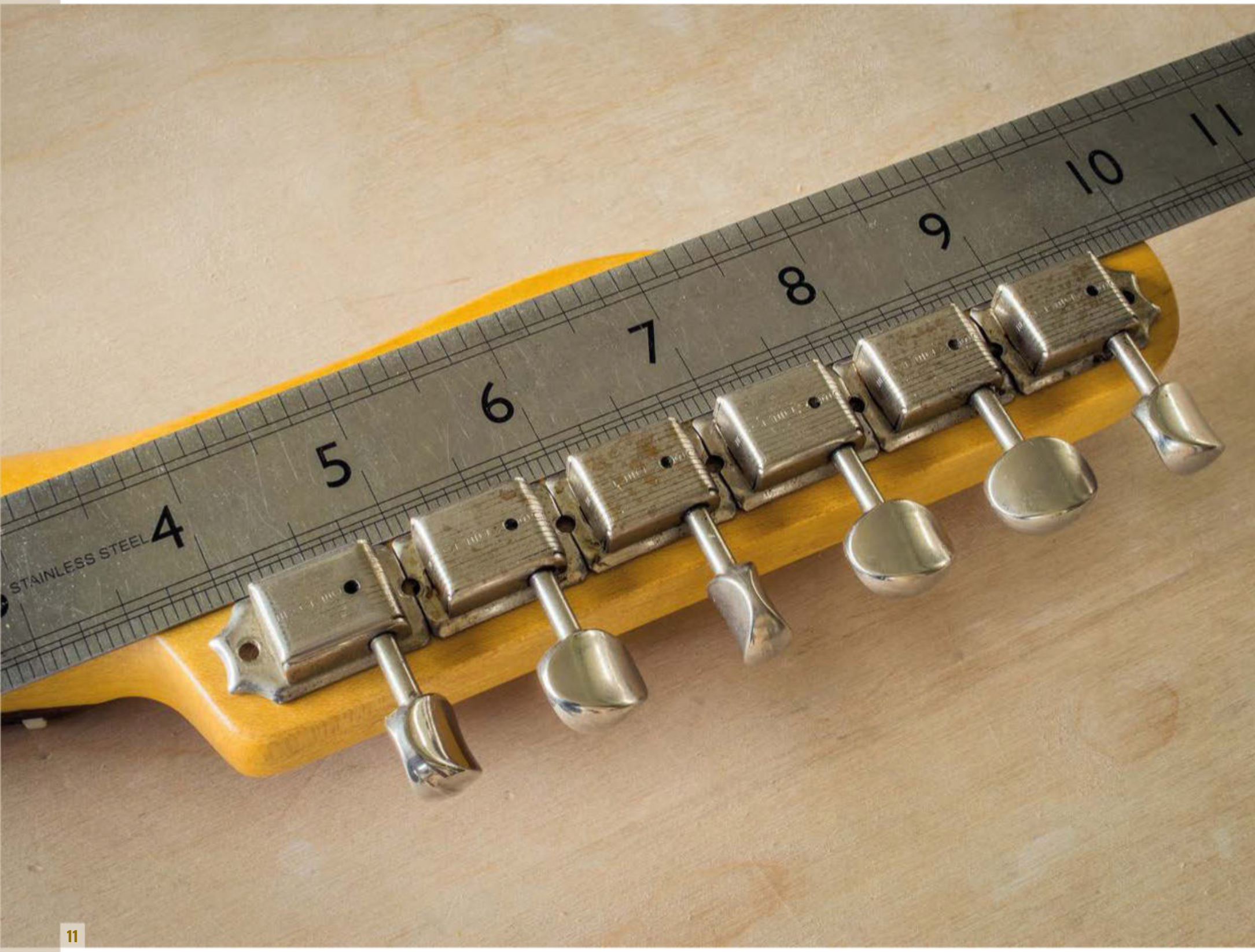
I tap the dowels in after first applying some Titebond Original glue. After that, I allow a few hours for the glue to set. I trim the excess with a flush cut saw but you could instead use a very sharp chisel and a lot of care.

With a set of tuners placed onto the headstock, I straighten them up using a ruler and mark the positions for the new screw holes. Hopefully the owner will install the tuners using narrower screws or wider pilot holes and there won't be any further mishaps.

Snapping screws is not uncommon and it's an easy mistake to make. If you ever find yourself having to exert a lot of energy to drive a screw in, it's best to remove the screw and drill the pilot hole a bit wider. But if the worst happens, you should now be able to fix it.

Specialist screw-extraction tools are available but they're a lot easier to get hold of in the USA than in the UK. StewMac lists a screw extractor but it'll cost you $33 plus shipping and duty. A one-metre length of brass tubing cost me £5.25 and the tool took about five minutes to make. Though the brass tube is really too soft, it does the job. Next, I'll be making a larger version to extract a snapped bridge post from a 1972 SG – a nightmare job that suddenly looks a lot less daunting.

For more on Huw's work, visit huwpriceguitar.com



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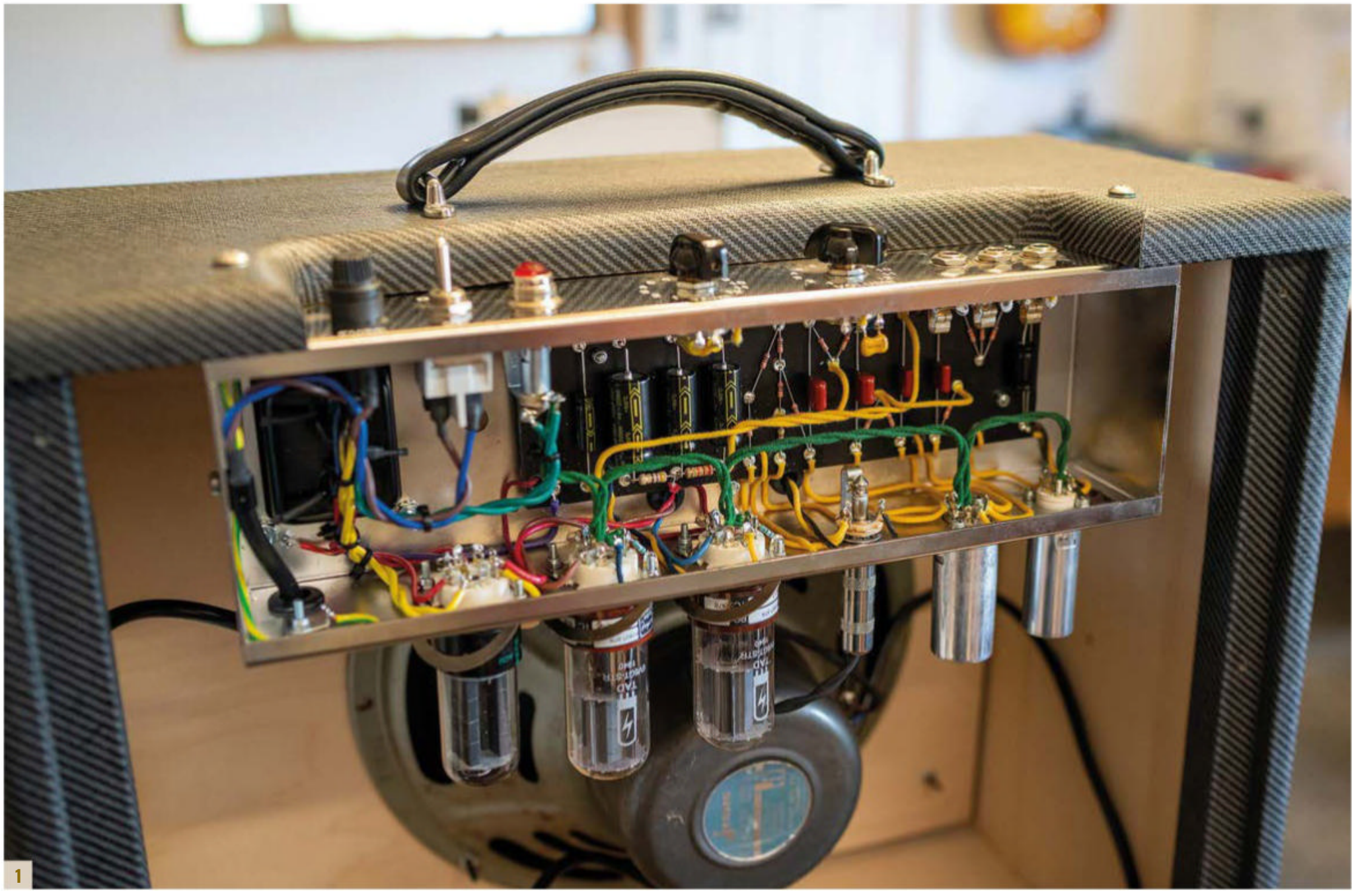
AMPLIFIER FAQ

Feel the need for low-wattage tweed tone but require more midrange control? Rift's Chris Fantana reveals an easy mod that can help

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



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1 A 5F10 Harvard circuit can fit into an off-the-shelf 5F2-A replica chassis with just minor modifications. This one was built by my apprentice, Jamie

2 The new volume and mid circuit, ready for testing

3 The mid control uses two 1nf capacitors, and a single 100k resistor which we've hidden behind the yellow wire

Hi, Chris. Is there a way to adjust the midrange on my tweed 5F10 Harvard clone?
Ed, Portsmouth

Hi, Ed. As some of our readers will know, many of the low-wattage tweed Fender amplifiers from the 1950s and very early 1960s came with a single tone control, allowing users to control the upper-frequency content. However, owing to the rather large 4.7nF cap in the circuit, some of the mids were affected too. This created a rather simple but effective tone control that could cover most bases without complaint.

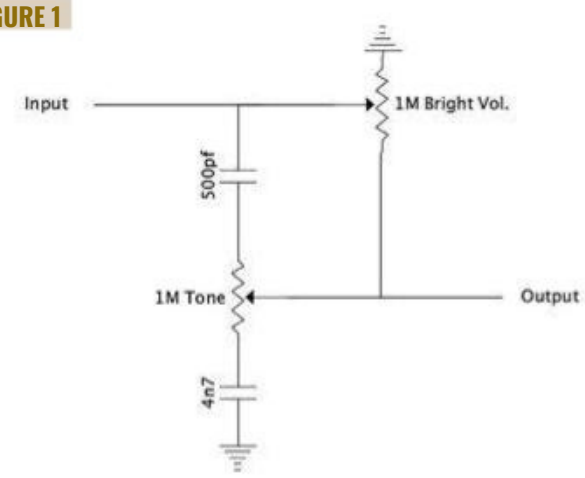
However, many players run the control at maximum, just to get a sense of top-end and clarity, even when set for clean operation. Tweed amplifiers were – and still are – replete with glorious midrange content that many find irresistible when paired with an era-appropriate guitar, such as an ash-bodied Tele. The slightly percussive front-end to the note, combined with the full-bodied push and presence, is one of those tonal wonders that players keep revisiting, time after time.

Plug in something from a later period, however, such as a 1970s Les Paul Deluxe, and the mids can become a little confused and muddy – congested, even. Thankfully, with a few small components and a soldering iron, we can make your amplifier much more versatile by converting the tone control into a midrange control.

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

This is a great modification that can easily be reversed if you don't get on with it. But I highly recommend that you give it a chance. You will, however, have to control the treble with your guitar's tone control. But you're already doing that anyway, right?

FIGURE 1



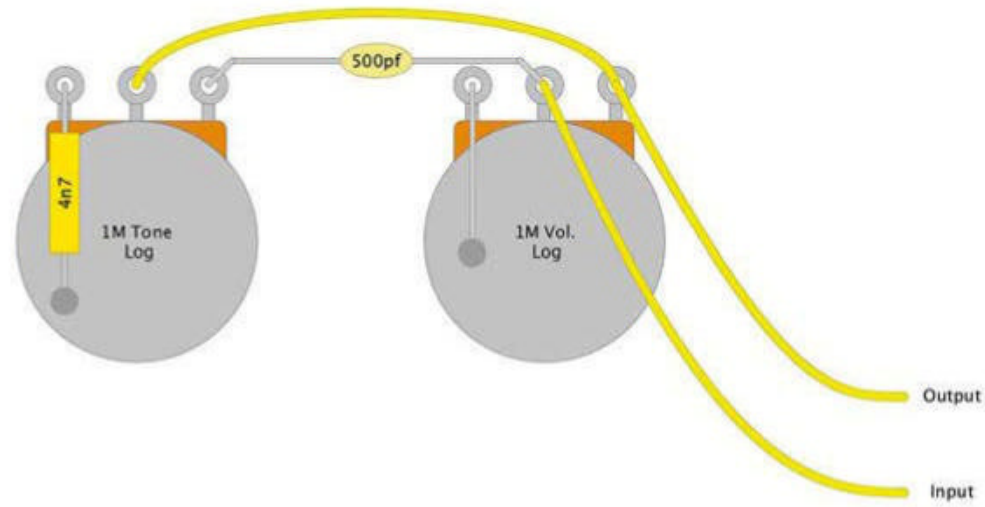
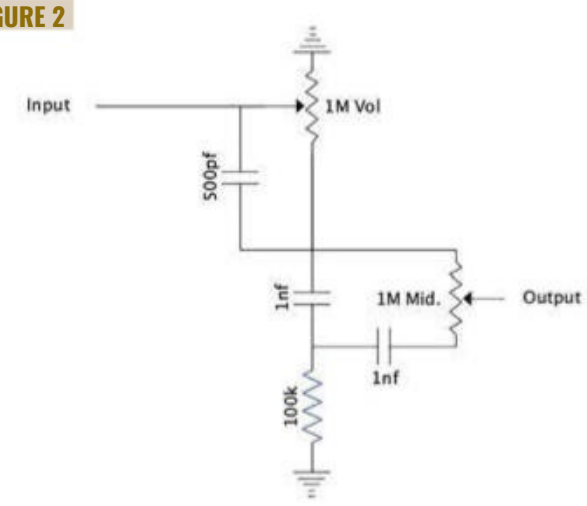
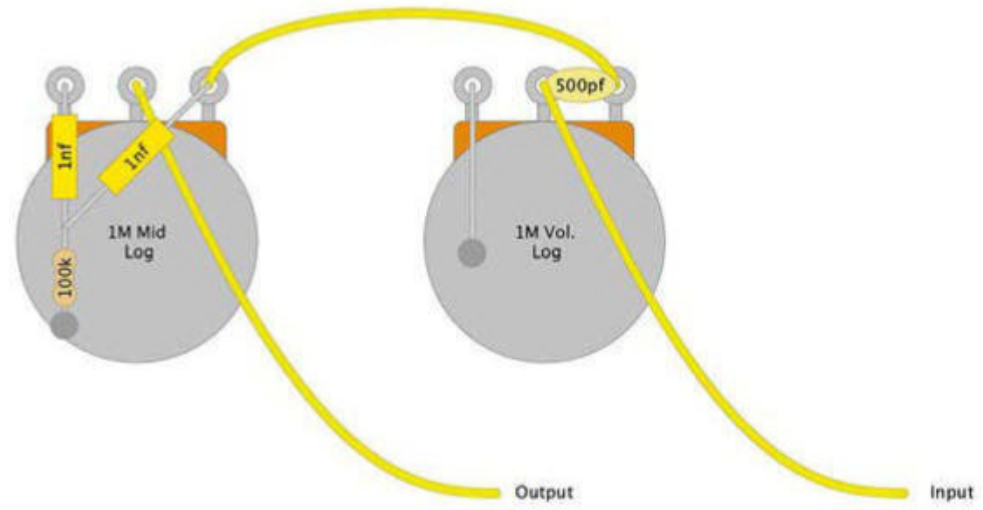
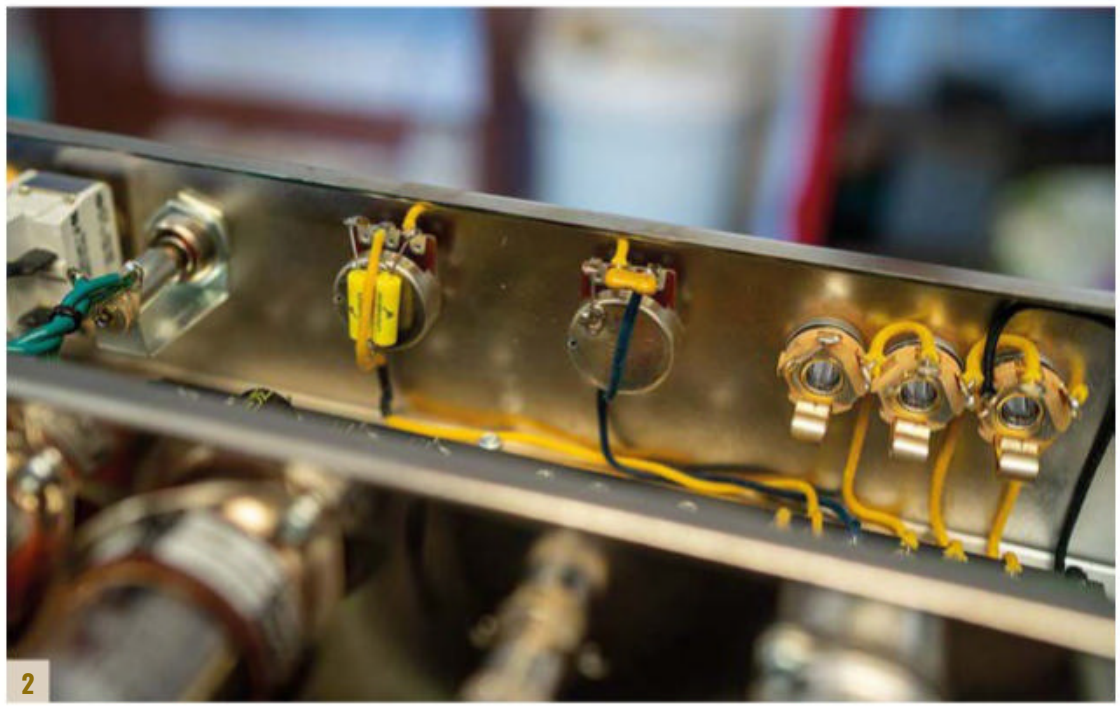


FIGURE 2



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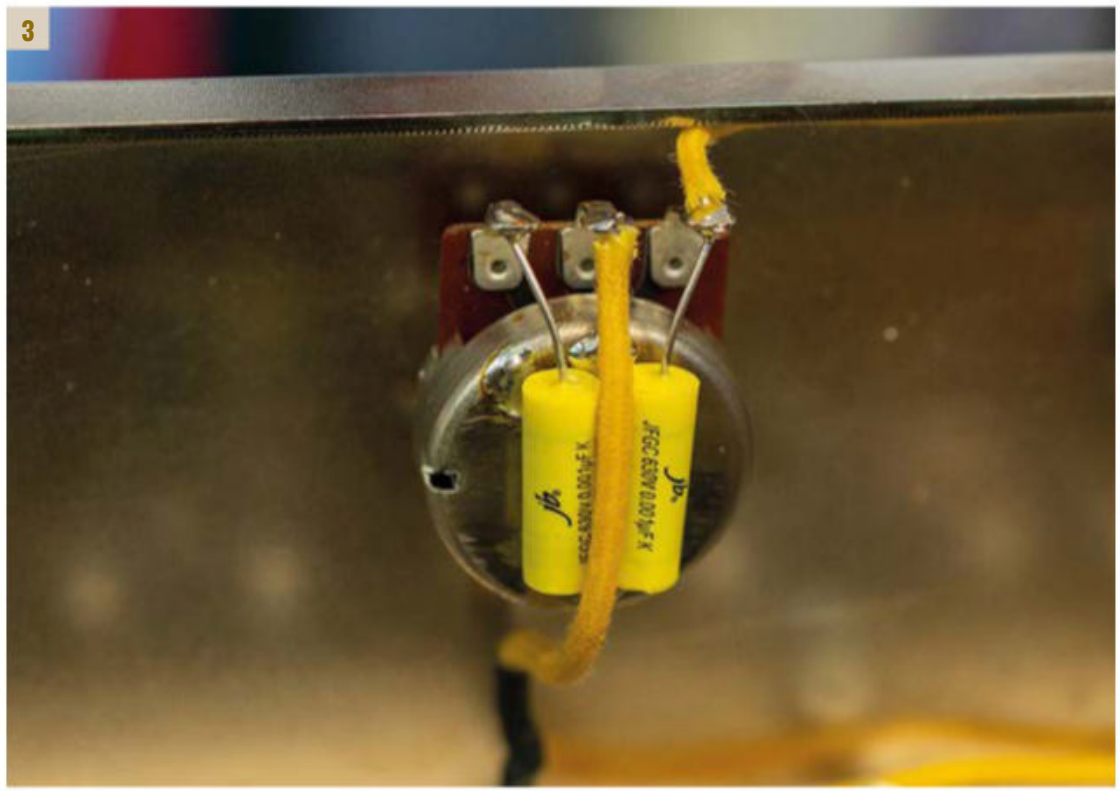
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With the control set fully clockwise, the tone is standard tweed. Turning it counterclockwise will progressively remove the mids, scooping out the sound and revealing the full detail of both the bass and treble frequencies.

Figure 1 above shows the stock 5F10 setup, consisting of two one-meg potentiometers and two capacitors. Figure 2 is our new circuit. Here, we have repurposed the tone control as a full-range mid, removed the 4n7 capacitor, repositioned the 500pf – which can also be removed entirely – and added the crucial 1nF capacitors and a single 100k resistor.

The input and output wires will connect to their current locations on the board but the output wire now connects to lug two on the mid control.

The two 1nf caps are connected to lugs one and three, with their other ends tied together, and then grounded via the 100k resistor. The back of the potentiometer is usually the best place for this. If you want to increase the scoop depth, you can decrease this resistor's value, down to a maximum of 22k.

This new circuit sits after the volume control. With a little know-how, it could be added to other amplifiers, such as a 5E3 Deluxe.

TAKING BACK CONTROL

With the mod complete and the usual safety checks in place, it's time to give it a try. Start at a moderately low volume and set the mid control fully clockwise. Using your guitar's tone control, back off the treble to suit your style, then slowly turn the mid control counterclockwise to hear the midrange drop away.

It requires practice to balance your amp, pedals and guitar in order to get the best out of this powerful tool. But once you do, I doubt you'll go back.

Visit riftamps.com for more information

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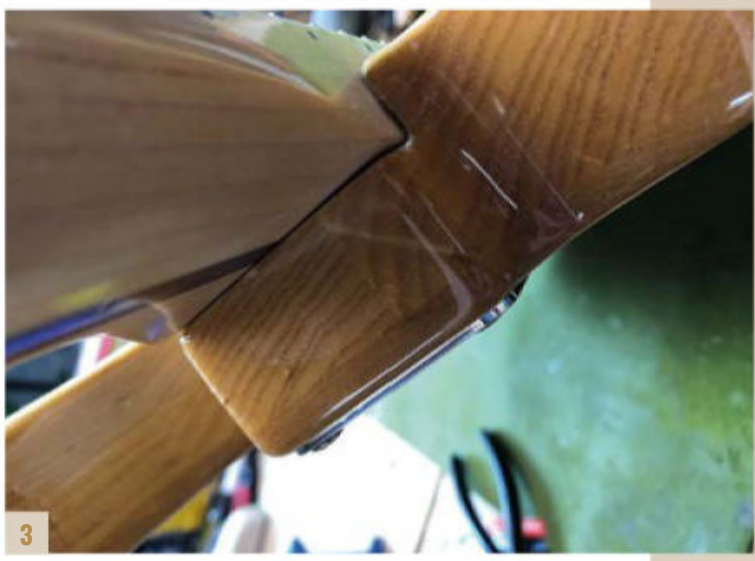

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TECH TALK

THINLINE NECK POCKET DILEMMA

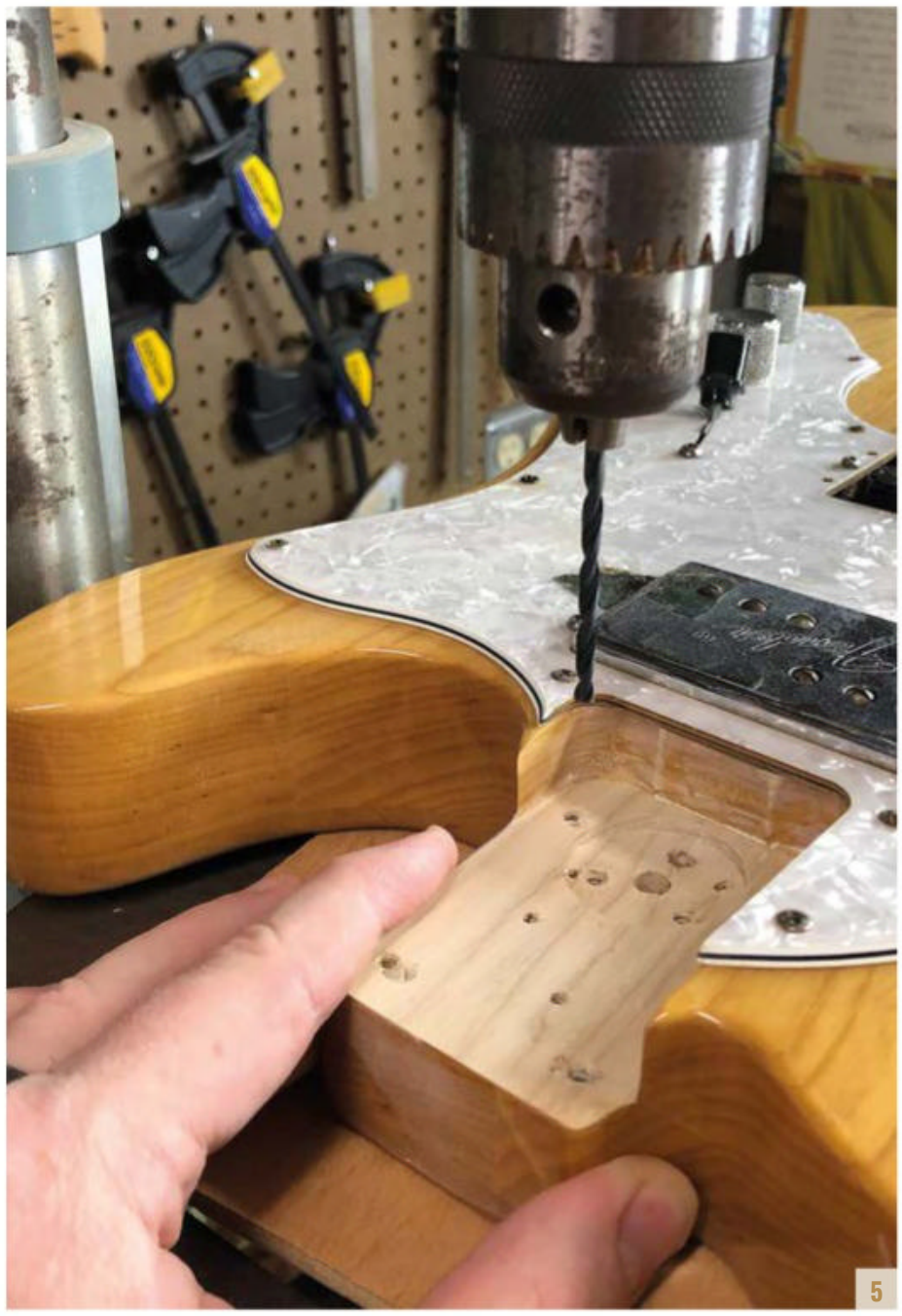
WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

What's that on Mike's bench? It's neither a Jazzmaster nor a Jaguar and it's definitely not an offset. This has to be some sort of trick, right?

Believe it or not, I do sometimes work on 'traditional' instruments, and my friend Conor's Thinline Telecaster reissue certainly qualifies as such… well, mostly. Conor is one of my favourite guitarists in the area. Not only is he an incredibly skilled tapper and a purveyor of tongue-in-cheek melodic metal but he's also a treble-hater like myself (we're big fans of dark-sounding amplifiers).

Conor brought his Telecaster to me for a basic setup but once I had a good look at the thing, it turned into much more. Its one-inch thick Warmoth neck had a few playability problems that turned out to be due to the stainless-steel frets popping out of their slots, which had to be pressed back into place and re-levelled. That part was straightforward enough. What wasn't so simple, though, was the issue I discovered in the neck pocket.

At first glance, the neck didn't appear to be properly mated to the body, with a gap between the pocket and neck heel that could be seen with the naked eye. So wide was the gap that I could hold a light on one side and see it shining through on the other. This isn't good for transference or for stability, and a gap like that could cause problems down the road if, for example, moisture became trapped there, which might cause the neck to warp.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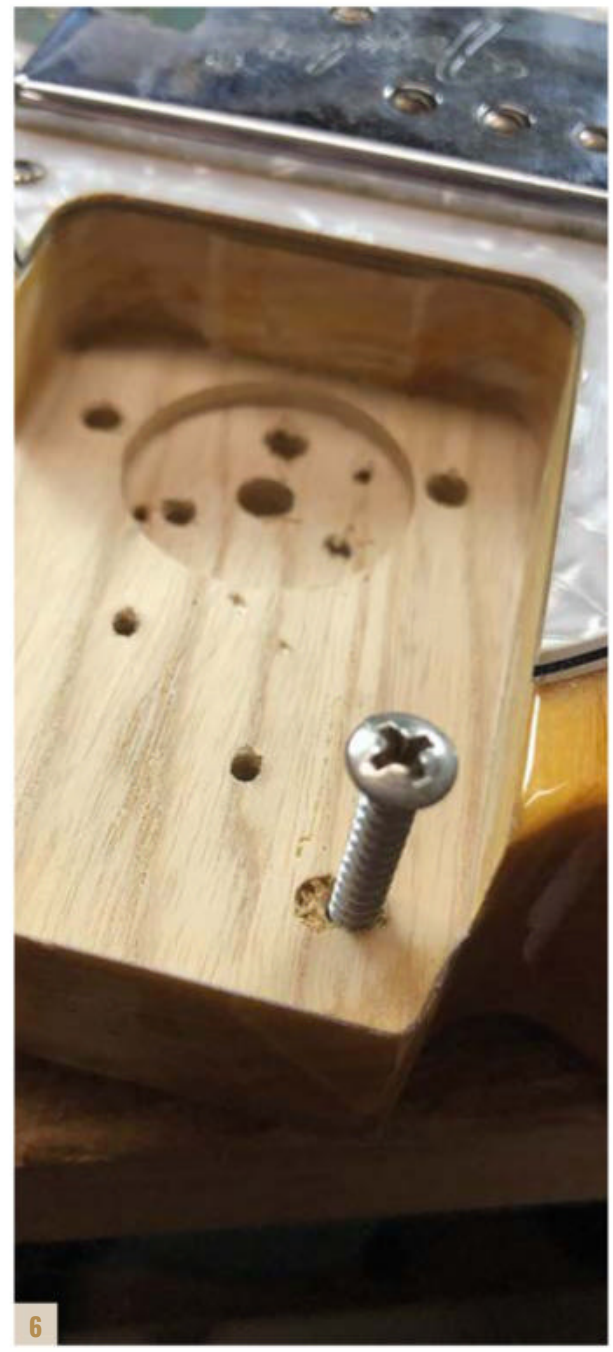
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1 Don't mind the Dirty Fingers

2 As a fan of skinny '60s necks, this Warmoth replacement is anything but

3 Mind the gap! (sorry, I'm American)

4 When light passes through, you know you have a serious problem. He's been playing it like this for years

5 Drilling out the holes for the neck screws

6 Checking my work. The screws now pass through easily but the holes aren't oversized – I don't want them shifting around

7 Using the Fret Rocker to check the neck pocket for level...

8 ... and it isn't at all!

9 The neck, however, is perfectly flat

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Once I had the neck off, it was clear that the main cause of the issue was that the holes drilled for the neck screws were undersized, which meant the screws were gripping the body. Ideally, the screws should pass through the body easily, gripping the neck only; as is, the screws tighten down to the body first, which leaves a gap. The fix here is a matter of drilling out those holes to a larger size. But first, there's another problem that needs correcting.

Upon removing the neck, something did not look right, so I used my StewMac Fret Rocker to check the pocket floor's levelling. Wouldn't you know it: it wasn't flat at all. Rocking the tool back and forth shows off the curve, and that's no good for a solid neck-to-body fit.

I can't say for certain that this neck pocket is 100 per cent the same as it was back when left the Fender Mexico factory,

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10 Introducing the Pocket Buddy

11 Stikit Gold paper comes in handy for almost every job

12 Paper applied to the Pocket Buddy (patent pending)

13 A few quick strokes to gauge my progress

14 Making progress...

15 Checking my work as I go – slow and steady is the rule of thumb here

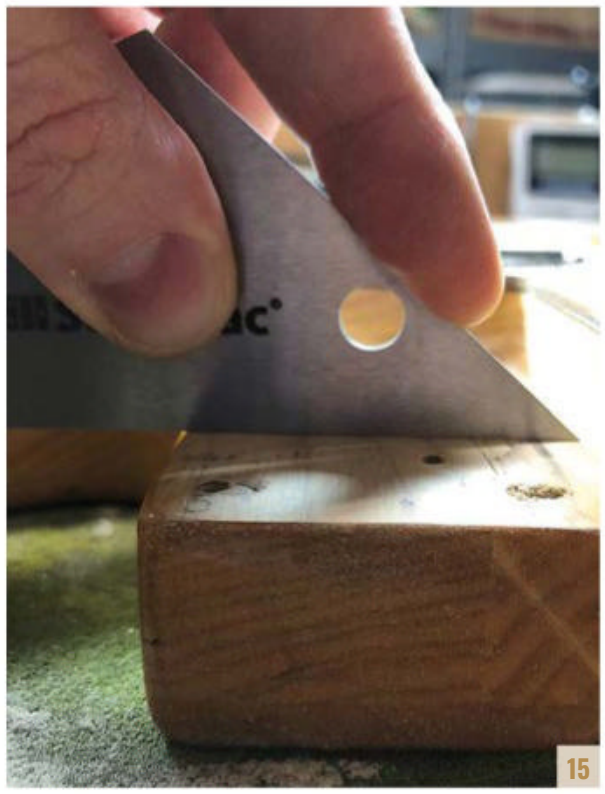
as the body had to be altered to accept the four-bolt Warmoth neck it now wears (this model originally had a three-bolt configuration with the Micro Tilt feature).

Correcting this meant flattening the neck pocket entirely, and necessitated the creation of what I call my 'Pocket Buddy.' I fashioned my Pocket Buddy from a block of leftover wood from a previous job. I traced the shape of the Warmoth neck heel onto the wood and cut out the rough shape using a bandsaw. I brought the block down to the correct shape on a belt sander, making sure to flatten out the bottom for a precision surface for the next step. I then used a strip of 400-grit Stikit Gold adhesive sandpaper to line that surface. The plan here was to use my Pocket Buddy, sized appropriately for the neck pocket, to level out the bottom of the rout and shore up the fit. I could've used a router but, with the small amount of material to be removed, I felt that might be overkill.

I gently sanded away, checking my work with the Fret Rocker and some calipers to ensure a level surface as I went along. Getting that pocket flat took about 15 minutes of careful work and left me with a neck pocket that matched the neck perfectly. Sure enough, when I reinstalled the neck, it was indeed a tight fit.

One fret level and crown later, and this guitar came to life with some Ernie Ball Power Slinkys. Not only does it feel more solid now, the guitar is acoustically louder than I remember too. I think Conor's going to be pleased – I know I am!

Follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen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16 I'm still seeing light pass beneath the Rocker so I'll have to keep going

17 The neck pocket is now level and ready for reattachment

18 & 19 With the neck back on, it's a tight fit all around

20 After a quick level and crown, this Thinline Tele plays better than it has in years

21 Look at those shiny frets!

17

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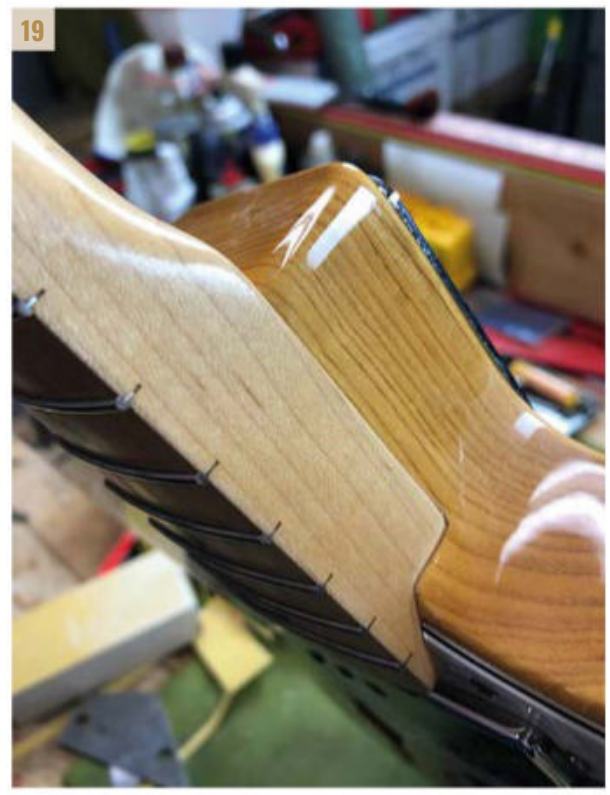
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FIVE MINUTES TO...

JAMES HETFIELD

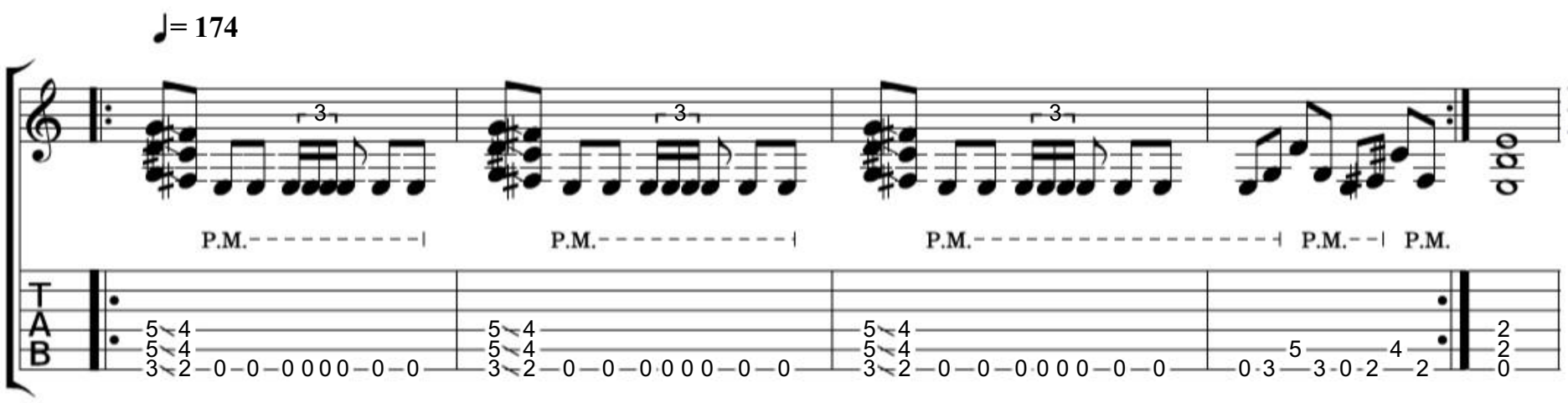
WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Metallica's king of riffs and rhythm has been an inspiration to countless players. Here's how to master (master!) his famously crushing technique

If you've yet to warm up your picking hand, do yourself a favour – because James Hetfield's right hand takes no prisoners. Best known among guitar players for his ferocious rhythm chops and his unparalleled ability to down-pick at positively inhuman speeds, Hetfield's playing is a huge part of what has made Metallica one of the biggest bands of all time. Here, we're breaking down a few whiplash-inducing thrash riffs to show you just how he does it.

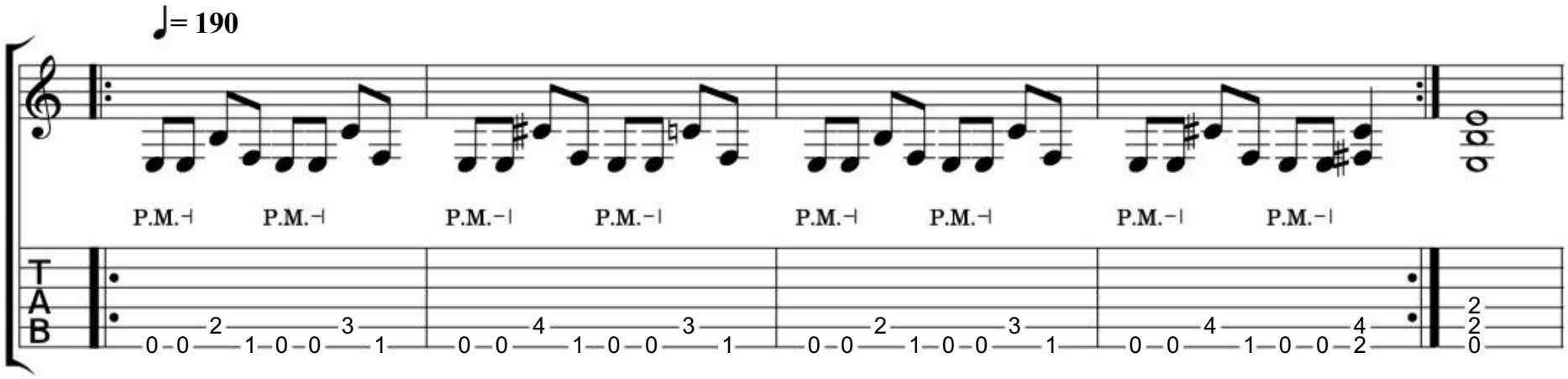
MACHINE-GUN BURSTS

For the majority of this speedy riff, you're playing eighth notes, from the sliding powerchord to the open palm mutes. But keep an eye out for what goes on over that third beat – an explosive burst of four 16th-note open-strings. At this tempo, these short, snappy bursts should have a machine-gun-like quality.



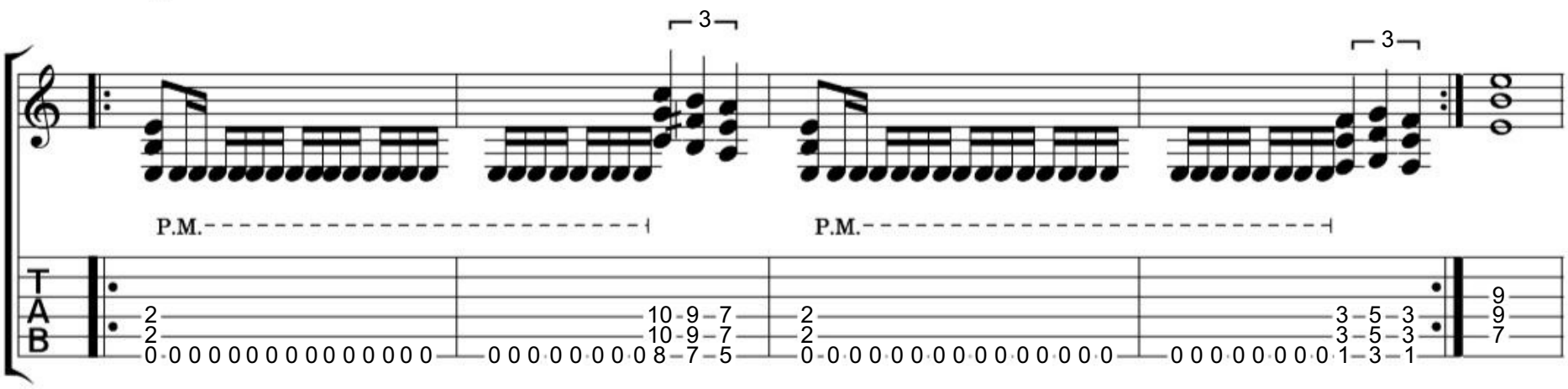
CHROMATIC MOVEMENTS

Cranking the tempo to 190bpm, this is a prime example of an early 1980s Hetfield riff, the kind that would be down-picked using chromatic movements against a repeated-note phrase. Start slow and build up your picking-hand stamina. Down-pick every note to give the riff more drive and attack.



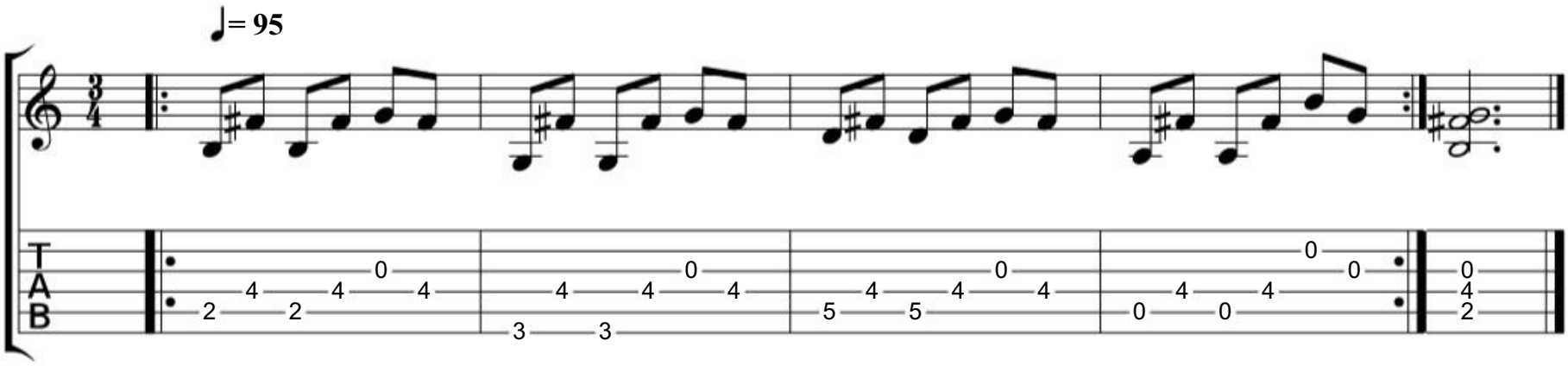
METAL THRASHING RIFFS

Back when Metallica were purely a thrash metal band, their output was made up largely of riffs like this. Play alternate-picked 16th notes on the open strings and frame them with powerchords at either end. At 160bpm, it won't be easy. Take your time upping the tempo.

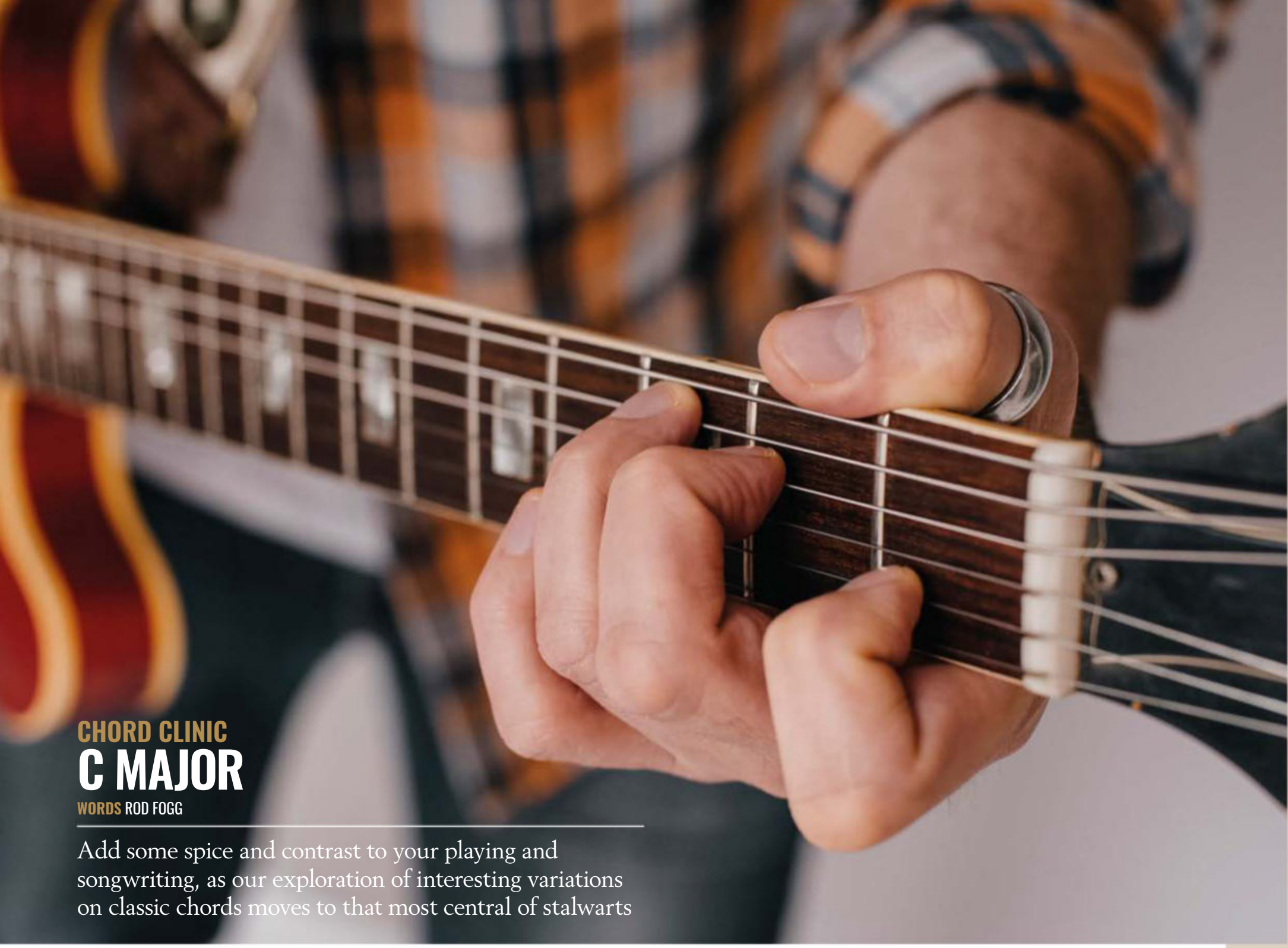


CLEAN PICKING IN 3/4

Though they remain a metal band, Metallica have never shied away from moody clean passages. This clean picked part in 3/4 uses some repeated droning notes against a root note that shifts with each bar.



Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has over 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com



CHORD CLINIC

C MAJOR

WORDS ROD FOGG

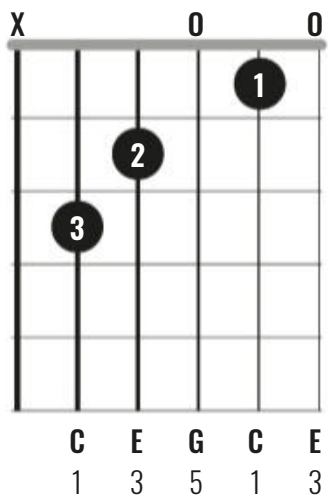
Add some spice and contrast to your playing and songwriting, as our exploration of interesting variations on classic chords moves to that most central of stalwarts

Justifiably the first chord that most beginner players learn on the guitar, C major is not particularly difficult to play. But when combined with F and G, this unassuming set of notes gives you chords I, IV and V in the key of C major, opening the way to countless campfire songs that make use of these three common chords. Add A minor (chord VI) and you have the four chords that are found most often in songwriting since the 1950s.

C major is also chord IV in the key of G. Add in D and E minor and you now have the same four I, IV, V and VI chords in G major. With a capo to transpose to any key, the road to singer-songwriter superhero status lies open before you.

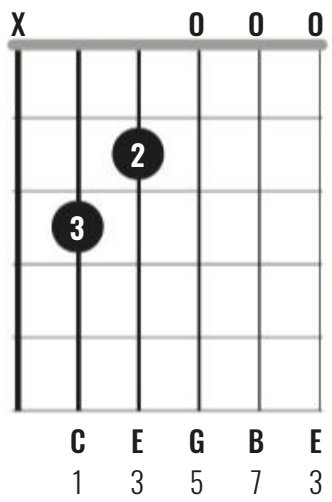
The notes of C major are C, E and G. These are root, major third and perfect fifth, steps one, three and five of a C major scale. Enjoy these examples – see you next month.

C



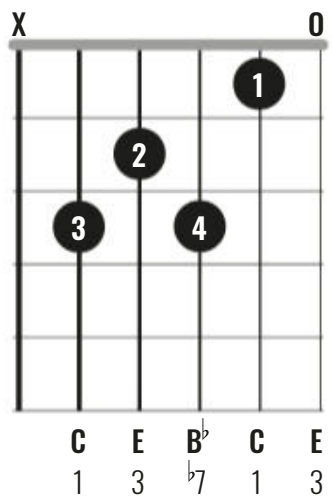
Make sure all five notes are ringing – it can be tricky to hold your second finger on the D string and still have the open G sound cleanly. Avoid playing the open sixth string; chords sound best with the root note in the bass. Mute this with the tip of your third finger or with your thumb over the edge of the neck. With the open E in the bass, you'd be playing C/E, useful if you're heading towards F.

Cmaj7



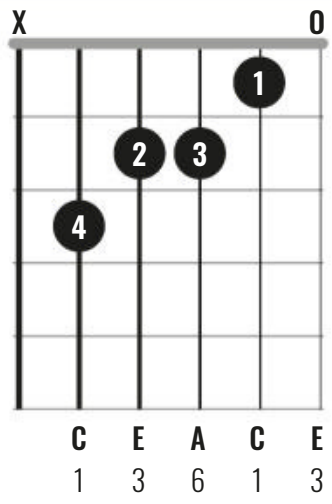
Leaving the first finger off the basic C chord introduces the open B string – the major seventh – and creates a dreamy C major seven chord. Pair this with an F major seven chord on your looper to create a laidback two-chord groove, then try soloing over it using the C major scale.

C7



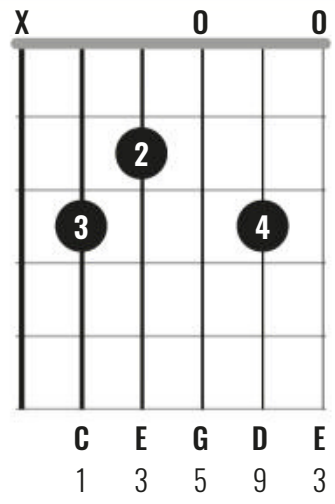
B♭ is the minor seventh above C and when added to the basic triad makes a C7 chord. This is the type known as a 'dominant' chord. C7 is chord V in F. Play figures one, two and three (above) and you'll get a distinctive, strong sequence. Follow with F or A7 and you'll have the start of a hit on your hands, hinting at many examples from artists as diverse as Sinatra, Bowie, S Club 7 and George Harrison.

C6



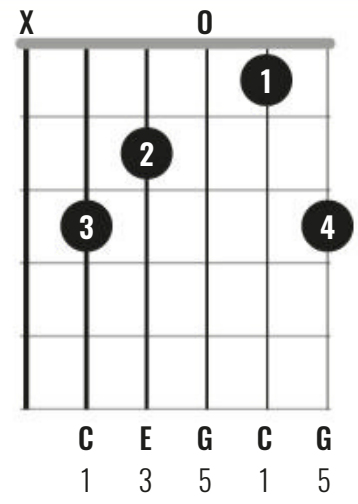
The major sixth is often added to a major chord, though in this case it requires some re-fingering. These days we tend just to call this 'C six'. A repeated sequence of C, Cmaj7 and C6 makes for another commonly heard sequence, creating movement while essentially staying on the same harmony.

Cadd9



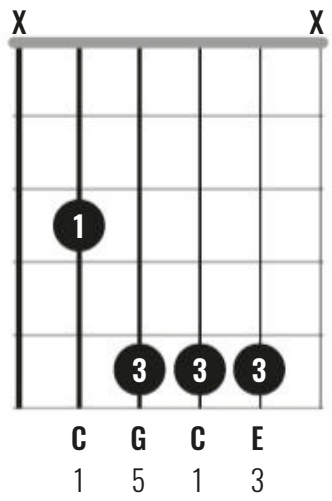
Moving finger four to the B string will give you an 'add nine' chord. This is what happens when you add the ninth (in this case D) and there's no seventh present. With a seventh, it would be C9 or Cmaj9, depending on whether it's the minor (B♭) or major seventh (B). Experiment with Cadd9, C, Cmaj7 and back to C.

C



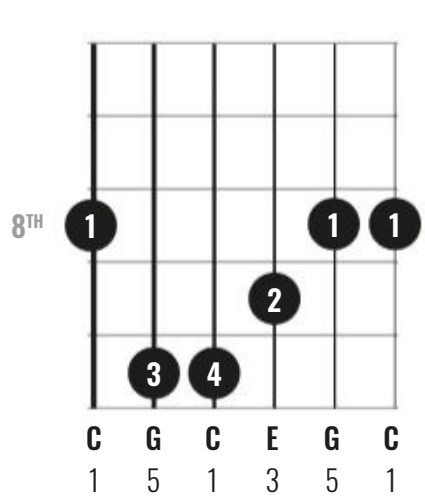
Continuing with your wandering fourth finger, in this example it's on the top string at the third fret. This gives you the note G, which is already in the chord, which means this is still C major, just in a different voicing. This adds a jangly quality by removing the doubled third and replacing it with a doubled fifth.

C



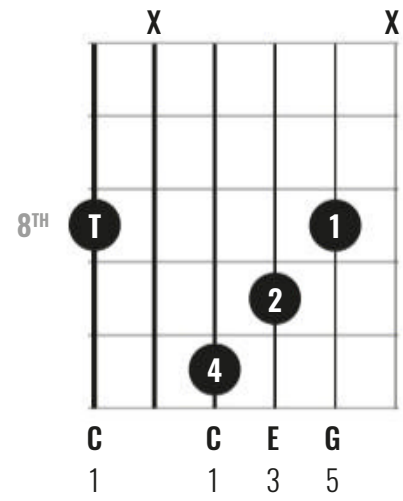
Anywhere you play the notes C, E, and G you have a C major chord, but guitarists often use the same shapes because they are convenient to play or sound good – or both. This is an example: chunky sounding and easy to play, especially on electric if you use the given fingering with a half barre from finger three.

C



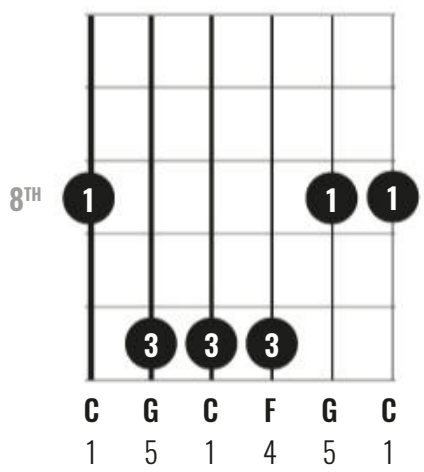
This is another popular C major chord played higher up the neck and is based on an E major open-string chord moved eight frets higher. This is the full-fat six-string version and is ideal for Townshend-style windmilling or punk thrashing. Move onto the following example for the more refined version.

C



Ditching the notes on the top E and A string from the previous example makes this more focused, powerful and less empty. It's also easier to play, providing you don't have a problem with thumb-over shapes. Mute the top E with the underside of your first finger and the A string with the tip of your third.

Csus4



You get a Sus4 chord when you substitute the fourth note above the root for the third; here that's F for E. Sus4 chords sound excellent when followed by the major chord, which reinstates that missing third. Try alternating between this Sus4 chord and C major at the eighth fret. See if you can work out the Sus4 version of example 9 too. Tip: just add your pinky on the G string.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

TALKBOX

JOSH RADNOR

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The star of *How I Met Your Mother* and *Hunters* on Travis picking, his love for battered old Martins and how coming to guitar late in life gave him a new creative outlet

The moment it all started...

"I learnt a couple of chords in college like everyone else but I didn't stick with it and I wasn't really anything of a guitar player. Then Ben Lee and I started writing songs together about seven years ago [as indie-folk duo Radnor & Lee]. We did a whole album but he was the only one playing guitar. I had such a great time. It felt like this coalescing of all these disparate skills. Then about four years ago, I was going through a hard moment and I picked up this Gibson J-45 that I'd had lying around the house almost entirely unused for years. I started playing chord shapes and I wrote this song called *Foolish Gold*. I played it for Ben and he loved it. I started playing it at our shows. Then I just threw myself into it. I got teachers in New York and LA so I could keep learning wherever I was working and I realised you can do so much with a little, y'know? Get a couple of chords under your belt and you can write thousands of songs. So that first year, I was writing many songs a week – they were just pouring out of me. It was an exciting time. It kinda felt like, y'know, when Spider-Man realises he can shoot webs out his hands! Like, wait a minute, I have this other skill!"

I couldn't live without my...

"I spent a month in Nashville in 2019 and I went to Carter Vintage Guitars and bought a 1955 Martin 000 that is just so fun to play. It's kind of banged-up in that way that you want, like a 23andMe for guitars. Like, who played this thing? Where has this thing been?!"

My signature model...

"I love Martins. I know that's probably a very obvious thing to say but there's just something about them, and they're a really good partner to work with. So there's an OM, I can't remember the number, that is kind of like a dreadnought shape but is a little thinner so that you're arm doesn't get jerked out so far. A friend of mine has one and I really love it, and I love the 000 I have. Whenever I play a Martin, I always think, 'I gotta have this one'."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"My New York teacher taught me Travis picking fairly early on, which is probably more complicated than beginner patterns. But I grew up listening to a lot of folk and I love learning simple songs – when I respond to a song, it's never super-complicated. I could live with C, F and G the rest of my life, y'know? My teacher thought the Travis picking would come in handy for me. When I pick up a guitar, I just do C, F, G and Travis pick. When you pick on an acoustic, you get a sense of the fullness of the thing."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"One of my teachers said, 'Great guitarists are defined by their right hand, not their left hand'. If you blow a couple of notes no-one cares but if you blow the rhythm people start getting confused."

My Spinal Tap moment...

Before the pandemic, the last gig I played was at Hotel Café with my friend Kerenza Peacock, who's this world-class violinist. My intention was to come out there and be a moody singer-songwriter who didn't say anything and just start playing. But I strummed the first chord and somehow my guitar had gotten whacked *completely* out of tune and this awful sound came out of it. That was the first moment of the show. I just started laughing. I had to retune my guitar. I told them that thing Miles Davis used to say: 'I don't perform, I just rehearse in front of the audience'. And then I said, 'Welcome to our rehearsal!' The rest of the show was great but it was a strange start."

I wish I was there...

"I would've loved to have seen Jeff Buckley at the Sin-é and those small clubs in New York in the early 1990s. I went pretty deep with those early Joni Mitchell recordings that were just released. Imagine stumbling into a Greenwich Village coffee shop on a snowy night in '64 or something and hearing the purity of that voice."

The first thing on my rider...

"I just need to stay hydrated. I definitely can't perform on a full stomach so there's not a lot of food requests. I feel like the days of outrageous riders might be behind us."

If I could just play one thing...

"I was in Spain years ago and my friend took me to this flamenco show at two in the morning in this secret room. That's the stuff that melts my face. I don't know that I'm ever going to get anywhere near there but I understand the kind of commitment that goes into being able to play that."

Josh Radnor's debut solo EP *One More Then I'll Let You Go* is out now on Flower Moon Records

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